The FBI Bloodhound

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/22423663.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationship:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Will Graham, Hannibal Lecter, Jack Crawford, Franklyn Froideveaux
Additional Tags:	Police Officer Will Graham, Hannibal Lecter is the Chesapeake Ripper, Alternate Universe - Different First Meeting, non-consensual drugging, Kidnapping, Suicidal Thoughts, borderline stockholm syndrom, Happy Ending, No actual suicide or self harm
Language:	English
Collections:	Hannibal
Stats:	Published: 2020-01-26 Completed: 2020-07-30 Words: 57,966 Chapters: 34/34

The FBI Bloodhound

by justheretoreadhannibalfics

Summary

Will Graham is a very successful detective for the local police, but when he gets shot, again, he is forced to see a psychiatrist for his trauma.

Trauma

Will huffed in frustration, drawing his gun and tossing one more annoyed glance over his shoulder at his partner. Then he crept into the building.

He did a sweep of the room, feeling only slightly worried for not having someone at his back.

He was damn good at his job, but the other officers tended to dislike him. He was on his third partner that year and it was only June. This one wasn't going to last long either, he could tell.

The building was dark, but Will saw evidence of recent and frequent use.

There was a quiet shuffle of movement in the next room and Will softened his footsteps to where they were nearly silent. He guessed they wouldn't have a gun on them, but he knew he shouldn't rely on just his intuition, no matter how good it had proven to be in the past.

There was a hushed conversation taking place, and Will strained his ears to hear.

"Word is, they set the bloodhound on us,"

"Hell no. They wouldn't. We're not big enough for that yet. Graham doesn't do small cases"

"Don't matter. We should lay low for a while. I hear he's gettin' close too."

"Damn. That's bad news."

The truth was, this really wasn't the type of case that Will would normally be doing. He had been better utilized for high profile cases, like murder or kidnapping cases, and his efficiency had earned him a name on the streets. Reality was that chief wasn't too happy with him not being able to keep a partner, so he had been downgraded to these drug dealers in the hopes of finding a match that would stick.

"If he really is on our trail, there's no getting out of it. Even if we go low now."

Will had a warrant for the arrest of these men. He knew just by their voices that they were the right ones. The guy had been right to say they didn't have much hope for escape. He had tracked them down after only two days on the case.

Stepping around the corner, Will raised his gun and directed it to the men. He did a sweep of the room to make sure they were the only ones there before he spoke.

"Joseph Carter. Donald Parks. You are under arrest."

The two men turned on a dime at the sound of his voice, the taller one seemingly terrified out of his mind as he raised his hands.

"How you know it was us?" He asked.

The shorter one sneered at his companion, his hands slowly lifting to his shoulders' height.

"He don't. He's guessing. We got rights. He can't do anything."

Will smirked. He switched on his radio.

"Clifton, I got them. Get in here asap."

The shorter man cocked his head curiously, and Will knew what was coming.

The moment his partner opened the door, the shorter man's hand shot down and pulled a gun from his belt. He aimed at Will and fired.

Will was hit in the shoulder, but he returned the shot with one bullet to the man's leg. The man went down with a cry of pain. He dropped the gun and Will kept his gun trained on the other man as he stepped forward.

Clifton had his gun on the man on the ground as Will kicked the gun away from him and looked to the taller one.

"Please step away and put your hands behind your head while my partner reads you your rights," Will said.

Clifton stepped forward to cuff the man, who was doing everything obediently with an expression of frightened awe.

Once that man was subdued, Will motioned for his partner to do the same with the one on the floor and he divided his attention between the two men to keep them in check.

They were both in cuffs and Will called in backup and EMT's for himself and the man he had shot. Will knew he was losing blood, but Clifton was nowhere near experienced enough to keep both men under watch. He would wait it out.

"Graham, what do you have to say for yourself?"

Will stood at attention, his arm in a sling, but his confidence didn't waver.

"I followed protocol and brought both men in alive, sir," he replied.

The chief hummed in displeasure.

"You left your partner outside," he said, "Care to explain why?"

"In case one of the men attempted to run, sir," Will replied.

The chief nodded.

"Clifton has requested a change of partner,"

The words came like a hollow thud into Will's mind. He wasn't surprised that it was happening, more by how quickly it had happened. Clifton had only been his partner for over a week.

Will's shoulders dropped by a margin, feeling defeated. The other officers might have been right about him being cursed.

"Have anything to say, Graham?" Chief said.

Will straightened, setting his jaw resolutely.

"No, sir."

The chief shook his head in bewilderment. Will had been through hell and back under his watch, but never overstepped his bounds or broken protocol. He would have been the ideal officer, if it weren't for his unsociable personality.

"I'm referring a Psychiatrist for you."

Will started.

That was truly a surprise for him.

"Sir?"

The chief lifted his head from the papers on his desk. He looked Will over and sighed.

"You've been shot, Graham," he said, "and I know it's not the first time, but you aren't immune to trauma. I want you to take a break from duty for a few days. I need you back at full force as soon as possible, but I think it would do you some good."

Will hated the idea. He hated Psychiatrists in general, but he hated thinking about them being in his head.

"With respect, sir," Will ventured, "I don't think that's necessary."

"With respect, it's not up to you," the chief replied, "You will go to the psychiatrist, and you will talk to them, or you will be suspended. Do you understand?"

Will gritted his teeth.

"Yes, sir."

The chief nodded, dismissing him.

"Silvia has the info. Check with her on your way out."

Will turned stiffly and left the office. He walked numbly to the desk where Silvia sat, pouring over her paperwork with more dedication than it called for.

Silvia looked up when Will approached and smiled brightly. She had always been nice to him.

“Will, I guess chief got the message across?” She asked, nodding to the office he had just left.

Will nodded.

“Then you need this,” she said, holding out an envelope with a business card paper clipped to the corner, “Good luck, Will. You’ll be fine, and you’ll get your regular cases back before you know it.”

Will thanked her and walked out the doors to his car.

He sat in a daze for a moment, holding the envelope in his lap, before he finally looked at it.

The business card looked high quality, and it was for a psychiatrist.

Hannibal Lecter.

That was a name to remember if there ever was one.

The envelope had instructions scribbled on the outside for it to be given to Dr. Lecter when Will went in to see him.

Will sighed and tipped his head back against the seat.

The last thing he wanted was to talk to some shrink, but he would do almost anything to keep his job. He was actually good at it, and that was a rare thing for him to find in life.

He tossed the card and envelope into the passenger seat and started up the car. He could wait to make the call until he was home with his dogs.

Whiskey

Will poured himself a glass of whiskey and sat at the table in his apartment. He tossed the card onto the table in front of himself and took a swallow of the liquid.

Hell. He didn't need to see a psychiatrist. He knew all the tricks anyway. Therapy had never worked on him, and he was doing just fine without it. He clearly didn't need it.

With a sigh, he pulled out his phone and dialed the number.

He took another swig of his whiskey as the line rang and steeled himself for the impending conversation. He pressed the phone to his ear with his shoulder so his hand was free to hold his glass.

"Doctor Hannibal Lecter speaking."

The accent caught Will momentarily off guard and he had to shake off the surprise before he replied.

"Uh, yeah. This is Will Graham. Chief Sutcliff recommended you to me for a psychological evaluation. I'm calling to set up an appointment?"

The man on the other side hummed in thought and Will imagined he was checking his calendar.

"I have an opening tomorrow at five in the afternoon," came the reply, "Is that a sufficient time for you?"

Will relaxed a bit into his chair and sighed.

"Yeah, that sounds good. See you then?"

"Very well. Goodbye, Detective Graham."

Will ended the call and downed the rest of his glass. That gave him plenty of time to get over a hangover if he decided to get drunk, but he had yet to decide if he wanted to.

Rosco padded up to him and placed his head on Will's lap. He grinned up at Will and his tail wagged.

Will smiled down at him and scratched between his ears.

"You and Bud want to go on a walk, huh," he said.

At the word, Rosco's tail gained new momentum and he bobbed his head in excitement.

Will stood up and grabbed his jacket from next to the door. Bud raced up to him and jumped at his knees as Will tried to clip the leashes to them.

Will opened the door and the dogs raced out ahead of him.

A surprised, but happy “oh” reached his ears from the hall and he internally groaned. He didn’t really want to have to talk to his neighbor just then, but it was too late.

Franklyn was petting Rosco on the head when he smiled up at Will.

“Will! You’re home at a strange time. Something happen at work?” Franklyn asked.

Will gestured to his bandaged shoulder and the arm in the sling.

“I got shot,” he explained, “I’m taking a few days off.”

Franklyn nodded as if he understood.

“Well, I hope you heal quickly. I sure feel safer with you out on the streets.”

Will only offered a smile and nod in reply. He didn’t have the energy to explain to Franklyn that he rarely worked the streets, but rather was usually working in an office or at the scene of a crime specifically.

“Yep. Well, I’m off to walk the dogs,” he excused himself, walking past Franklyn and toward the sidewalk.

Franklyn nodded and waved goodbye as Will walked quickly away.

Will made his way to a park that, though large and well curated, usually had few visitors. It was one place he knew the dogs would likely not bother anyone when he let them off their leads.

Rosco stayed near Will, though he would wrestle and play with Bud. Bud liked to run as fast as he could in every direction, but he would listen if Will called.

Will walked slowly out into the large field and breathed in deeply. The grass had been cut in the past day, and the smell was still prominent in the air. Bud rolled in the grass, yipping and jumping with wild excitement. Rosco watched from Will’s side, grinning and wagging his tail contentedly.

Will waved Rosco forward, letting him run and play as he wished, and sat down in the grass. The dogs tumbled together and danced around. Bud thought he would be able to take Rosco down if he tried, but Rosco was larger, and solid. The larger dog played well with his companion, going easy on him and letting him win frequently.

Will lay back, resting his head in the grass and feeling a pleasant breeze play through his hair. He kept track of the dogs by listening to where they moved.

He might not need a psychiatrist, but Will thought in that moment that he probably would benefit from a few days off of work. Having his head filled with criminals probably didn’t do wonders on his mind.

He was definitely going to be on desk duty until his shoulder healed, once he went back in. Will was damn good at his job, but he didn't really like being stuck in the offices. He preferred the field.

"Sir, is that your dog?"

Will opened his eyes and looked up at the woman standing over him. He glanced over where she was looking, to see Rosco. The dog was trotting around like a horse, and Bud was off a few meters farther away.

Will propped himself up by his one good elbow and nodded.

"Yes ma'am. He is," he replied.

"He's very well behaved," the woman remarked.

Will nodded again, watching as Bud raced up to tackle his playmate. Rosco batted him aside repeatedly and feigned a few pounces himself.

"Thank you," Will said on behalf of his well behaved dog, "I hope he isn't bothering you for being off his lead."

The woman shook her head at his offered apology.

"Oh, no. I just wanted to know where he was trained," she said.

She waved her hand over her shoulder and Will could see a young boy with a border collie on a lead. The dog looked young and overexcited, tugging on the lead hard and almost knocking the child over.

"I don't know a thing about dogs, but my husband refuses to look for a good trainer. He thinks he knows enough. The only problem with that is that he's not home enough to train her."

Will nodded in understanding. Too many people bought dogs without knowing how to train them, but were unwilling to admit it.

"Sorry," Will said, "I can't help you there. I trained them myself."

The woman raised her eyebrows in surprise.

"Congratulations," she said, "though I assume you mean that you don't take in projects for hire?"

Will shook his head.

"I'm no professional, and I have a day job. I'm sorry."

The woman shrugged.

“I suppose it was too much to hope for,” she said defeatedly, “but I did hope I could find somewhere to take her.”

The boy led the dog up to his mother and the dog walked right up and licked Will’s face. Will laughed and petted the dog gently.

“She’s a beautiful dog,” Will commented. He sat up fully and patted her down. She was definitely young, probably only about a year old.

“Her name’s Marigold,” the boy proclaimed proudly, “But we call her Mary.”

Will nodded, not looking up. He placed a hand on the dog’s head and pushed her gently.

“Sit,” he said calmly, and she sat.

The woman watched carefully, clearly trying to figure out what Will was doing. Will scratched Mary between her ears and smiled at her.

“Good girl, now lay.”

Will pressed on the top of her head softly until her chin was touching the grass. She looked up at him curiously, but didn’t make any complaint when he scratched her again.

“Good girl,” Will said.

“What you up to?” The boy asked, moving up so his shin was against Will’s knee.

Will glanced up for a moment before turning his attention back to the dog.

“I’m showing you how to train her,” Will explained.

“How do you know how to do that?” the boy replied.

Will whistled without looking up, and eight paws bounded up from behind him before Rosco and Bud were seated obediently at his back.

Will turned to them and petted them each in turn.

“This is Rosco, and this is Bud. I trained them,” He said.

The boy seemed impressed, but his mother was more so. She was shaking her head in wonder as she observed the behavior of the dogs.

Will gave them each a few tips on training their young dog, but he was feeling increasingly anxious from the interaction. He excused himself and ushered the dogs away.

Will walked a few blocks before he clipped their leads back on. They didn’t really like to be on their leashes, but his apartment building required them, and he didn’t trust the neighbors not to rat him out.

The sun was setting when he shut his apartment door behind them and took a deep breath.

He wasn’t terribly unsocial, in his own opinion, but he was also not very good at being social, so it would wear on him when he was. Taking his dogs out wasn’t normally such a mental ordeal for him.

Will unleashed the dogs and sat back down at the table in the kitchen. He stared at the card in front of him, dreading his upcoming appointment already.

He poured himself another glass of whiskey.

Approval

“Good afternoon, Detective Graham,” Doctor Lecter said, “Please, come in.”

Will gave him a brief, polite smile and walked through the door to the office, handing him the envelope as he passed. The room was larger than he had expected, and gave off a completely different energy than he could have anticipated.

“Please, sit down,” Doctor Lecter said, gesturing to a pair of chairs set to face each other. He walked over to one and waited as Will took his seat before sitting himself.

“Now, if you don’t mind, I would like to know what you think led Andrew Sutcliff to refer you to me,” he continued, plucking a notebook from the table beside him, “He sends very few of his officers to me.”

Will studied the psychiatrist across from him. His posture was relaxed, but formal. He was wearing an absurdly nice three piece suit, that Will knew would probably cost more than his monthly pay. He had an imposing figure, but spoke kindly, probably to instill trust in his patients.

“I got shot,” Will stated blandly, “so he thinks I am dealing with trauma.”

Doctor Lecter nodded, his eyes flicking to Will’s sling for only a moment.

“But you think he is mistaken for thinking you need to speak with a psychiatrist,” he observed.

Will chuckled lightly.

“Therapy doesn’t work on me, so he is really only going to get an evaluation out of this. Which brings me to my point,” Will said, “If you could just declare me stable and sane, I can get out of your hair and be on my merry way back to work.”

Doctor Lecter pursed his lips, clearly annoyed by such a rash proposal.

“I’m afraid I cannot do that in good conscience until we have spoken more,” he said, making Will resign to his fate.

“I passed the screening. I’m an officer already. I can do my job better than anyone else they’ve got, so I just need to get back,” he said, a note of desperation coloring his tone against his will.

The doctor tipped his head curiously, and Will knew he had picked up on it.

“Look, I don’t know what was in that envelope, but Chief knows I can do what needs to be done. He knows I’m fine. He just thinks I need to be more social,” Will tried.

Hannibal shuffled the papers that he had extracted from the said envelope. He read through one of them again before looking up at Will.

“Andrew seems to think you deal with more stress than you let on, and that it may be building up and affecting your work. You are here to prove otherwise?”

Will sighed, leaning back in the chair. He had called him Andrew.

“So you know Chief,” he concluded, “I should have known. It seemed a bit weird that he referred a specific psychiatrist and not just any. I really don’t think he has any clue what goes on in my mind.”

The doctor hummed thoughtfully for a moment.

“You naturally and smoothly attempt to avoid questions. I am curious as to what qualifications a question must meet for you to either answer or avoid it.”

Will huffed in frustration. This guy was clever, and infuriating.

“I was just thinking aloud,” he said, a touch defensively, “I’m a good profiler. It’s what I do. You don’t like that, then let me leave.”

The doctor nodded.

“I do not mind it, as long as you do not use it as a tactic for avoiding questions. Please, I would like to know what your purpose is for coming. Clearly, you are invaluable, so you did not feel your job was in danger. I would like to know your personal reasoning behind this decision.”

Will sighed heavily.

“I want Chief to feel reassured. He thinks I need to talk to a psychiatrist, so I’m talking to one. I don’t have to actually let you know what’s going on in my head for him to feel secure,” Will replied.

Doctor Lecter nodded again, shuffling his papers slightly.

“I am beginning to believe no one really understands what occurs in your mind, aside from perhaps yourself. That must be tiring for you.”

Will pushed his glasses up his nose. He only wore them for things like this, but this guy didn’t seem to be affected by them. People usually got at least partially distracted by them, and allowed their perception of him to be colored by their presence.

“It must be,” he conceded, “but I’ve never met anyone who wasn’t decidedly unhappy with whatever they found out about my inner workings. I can’t typically keep friends, as they tend to run away when they get to know me. It’s better this way.”

Hannibal Lecter stood up and walked to his desk. He pulled a paper from a folder sitting there and walked back. He sat and wrote something down on the paper before extending it

toward Will in offering.

Will furrowed his brow, but reached out to accept the paper.

“What’s this?” he asked before he had even looked at it.

The doctor smiled softly.

“It’s the result of you psychological evaluation,” he stated casually, “I declare you mentally stable and more or less sane. Congratulations.”

Will pressed his lips together and studied the doctor suspiciously.

“So, you rubber stamp me. Great. I can tell there’s a catch.”

The doctor’s smile widened, and it was genuine, not his earlier polite ones.

“Well done. There is indeed a catch. I would like you to be one of my regular patients, at least for a while,” he said, looking over Will as if he were still deciding, “Perhaps simply until your wound heals. I would like to provide a safe place for you to work through the thoughts others may not understand. Are you satisfied with this arrangement?”

Will grimaced. Now he would actually be going to a psychiatrist regularly, which was not something he had ever wanted to do, but if that was what it was going to take to get the passing grade, he would do it.

“You think you won’t get scared off by what knocks around in my head?” He asked.

The doctor’s smile gained a dangerous glint that was gone so fast Will wondered if it had really been there.

“I have faith in my ability,” he said, “so do you accept?”

Will sighed in resignation.

“Alright. I’ll come. What should I expect my appointment time to be?”

Doctor Lecter checked his planner, more for show than actual necessity.

“This slot is available. Does that sound satisfactory to you, or would you prefer a different time?” He asked.

Will shrugged, standing up.

“It’s as good as any, I suppose. Next week then?”

The doctor stood and agreed. He showed Will to the door and bid him goodbye until their next appointment.

Will made his way to his car, feeling both apprehension and triumph. He had the paper that would allow him to continue his work, but he had just committed to seeing a psychiatrist.

Meeting

“So, the good doctor gave you the clear,” Silvia said when Will walked in, “Glad to have you back.”

Will offered her a nervous smile in return.

“Yeah. I’m glad to be back. Do you know Doctor Lecter too?” He asked.

Silvia laughed.

“Almost everyone knows him,” she replied, “he has only been in psychiatry for a couple of years, but he’s brilliant at it. He used to be a surgeon. He is in very high society, though, so I haven’t met him more than once.”

Will nodded, filing the information away for later. That all sounded very much like the man he had met. He seemed very competent, and had a refined taste that would suit higher social gatherings.

“Well, I’ll leave you to your paperwork,” Will said, glancing at the doodles that scattered over her papers, “I know you let yourself become totally engrossed in them.”

Silvia laughed and waved him away as he made his way to his desk. He plopped his bag down on the floor and slumped into his seat. There was a file waiting on the desk and he flipped it open.

The first page was informing him of his new partner assignment.

Will sighed heavily at the sight. They had already found him a new partner, and he was going to have to try to keep them happy with him.

Matthew Brown. A very normal name if he had ever heard one. Younger than Will, which was a cause for concern, as he was already very young for his position. He seemed to have done well so far, so Will would give him the benefit of the doubt.

As he read through the file, a figure came and stood by his desk. He didn’t glance up, testing to see if they were willing to be patient for his attention. They stood in stiff attention, but their hands hung loosely by their sides to give the impression of ease.

Will finally looked up at the young man. His hair was cropped short and combed neatly. He smiled, his mouth leaving the expression a tad crooked. He had dimples, giving him an even younger appearance for the smile.

“Matthew Brown,” Will stated, “coming over to introduce yourself?”

The young man nodded, clearly pleased with Will’s guess.

“I’m looking forward to working with you,” he said, extending a hand.

Will shook his hand and made a note that he was well toned, likely from some kind of rigorous exercise routine.

“I’m surprised to hear that,” Will replied with a frown, “Hasn’t anyone told you I’m the cursed partner? No one wants to work with me.”

Matthew shrugged, his smile never wavering.

“I don’t pay much mind to office gossip,” He explained, “and I have been impressed by your work, so I hope we can get along with one another.”

Will nodded.

“I hope so too. Chief won’t let me do the real work unless I get you to hang around, so I’ll have to do my best.”

Matthew laughed, and his gaze was a bit off-putting, as he made no effort to hide the fact that he was staring at Will. He had not taken his gaze from Will for the entirety of their interaction.

Will waved his new partner away, saying he needed to get on with the paperwork, and sat back at his desk.

Matthew seemed nice, and would likely be a good partner for any officer. Will just felt bad that he was stuck with him. No one wanted to be Will’s partner. He just wasn’t very likable.

There was another case in the file behind the paper for Matthew, and Will turned his attention to it.

To his surprise, it was a murder case. Chief had given him a murder case to work on, even though he was on desk duty. Will sighed in relief. Chief still trusted him.

He set the pictures out in an order that only made sense to him.

He committed it to memory as quickly as he could and closed his eyes.

The images swirled in a cyclone of information in his head, lifting and floating through his mind until they settled and fell into place.

This was an old case. Will knew it was, because he recognized the killer. It was the guy everyone was calling the Chesepeake Ripper. He hadn’t been active for over a year, and most people thought that meant the window to catch him had closed.

Will had only seen his killings in passing, having been too green at the time of his activity to be given the high profile cases. Despite his relative unfamiliarity, Will knew this was one of his. It had the same feel to it.

He checked the date on the file and frowned. There had to be some mistake. Someone would have told him if the Ripper were active again.

Unless they didn't know.

Will snatched the file up and stalked to the Chief's office.

Will grumbled to himself as he trudged into Doctor Lecter's office.

Chief thought he needed more time off.

Let him go to hell if he didn't listen. Will knew what he was seeing, and he was seeing the Ripper. Right then, all he needed was someone to pelt with his thoughts, and he considered no one more deserving than his very own psychiatrist.

Lecter had all but asked for this. Actually, he had asked for it. He wanted Will to come back and talk about what knocked around in his head. Well here Will came, with plenty to throw at him.

Hannibal Lecter opened the door ceremoniously, and Will brushed past him with a gruff greeting.

"Good afternoon, Will," Doctor Lecter said, slightly stiff in his greeting after having been ignored rudely by his patient.

"Yeah, Hi, " Will offered in return, slumping into the seat he had occupied the week before, "You asked me to come back and talk about what goes on in my head, so you're gonna get it."

Lecter raised an eyebrow in consideration before nodding and taking his seat across from Will.

"Very well, what is on your mind today?" He asked politely.

Will huffed.

"The damn Ripper is back, and Chief doesn't believe me," he declared in frustration.

The doctor seemed to pause briefly at his words, but nodded after a moment. All his annoyance towards Will dissipated curiously.

"I can see why he would hesitate to accept that," he replied, "why don't you tell me why you believe it is the Ripper?"

Will frowned.

"In that envelope, did Chief give you clearance for these cases?" he asked for surety.

Doctor Lecter smiled.

“He gave me clearance for whatever you may say to me, Will. You may speak without restraint here.”

Will wanted to laugh. That was something ridiculous if he had ever heard it. If he spoke without restraint, he would be locked up in the mental hospital before he got half way through his trail of thought.

“Alright. I guess I can’t explain it exactly,” he confessed, “But I know what the guy is like. I have seen his other scenes. I know how he thinks. I can feel him in the way everything plays out. I felt him in this new one. I know it’s him.”

The doctor nodded as if he understood what Will had just said.

“I believe what you have is pure empathy,” he stated.

Will blinked in surprise. That was unexpected. He had anticipated some sort of scoff at his vanity or something like that. Most people were more hesitant to accept that he could feel a killer in a scene, and would rather declare him insane.

“Alright,” Will said, “so?”

The doctor tilted his head, intrigued.

“You can put yourself seamlessly into the shoes of anyone you observe or meet. You can put yourself in my place, or others, or some that may scare you. Not everything you find is tasteful.”

Will considered this. It was more or less an accurate description of how he worked, he supposed. Essentially, yeah, that was what he did.

“Right, so what do I do about it?” Will asked, waiting for the doctor to elaborate on his condition.

“I assume you already build forts in the bone arena of your mind, in an attempt to protect the things you love. I think they are likely less effective than you would like, and you find your moral side is shocked by the associations you draw. You have no effective barriers.”

The doctor laid it all out so plainly, that Will grimaced at him. He felt like he was on the wrong end of a criminal profile, which made him incredibly uncomfortable.

“I don’t like having people in my head like this,” Will admitted, almost threateningly.

The doctor nodded, as if conceding.

“My apologies. That was a bit of an analytical ambush. You are an intriguing individual, Will,” the doctor said.

Will was surprised by his wording. Most psychiatrists had tried to dehumanize him by referring to him as a subject, or a patient, or simply talking about his mind, as if it were separate from him. Few had ever intentionally recognized his individuality.

“Whatever, just keep it professional,” Will tried, tearing his gaze away from the doctor and looking around the office.

The doctor studied him for a moment before responding.

“I don’t think we need to keep these visits simply professional,” he said, drawing Will’s gaze back, “You clearly do not want a psychiatrist, but you need a place of safety and comfort. I think you and I could become good friends, and I could offer that to you if you would allow it.”

Will was completely taken aback. This guy must have been crazy to say things like that. No one had suggested friendship so plainly to Will. They typically didn’t want anything more to do with him. He hadn’t even been polite or kind to him, and Doctor Lecter was suggesting they become friendly?

“You can’t be serious,” Will said incredulously.

The doctor smiled.

“I think you would be more comfortable speaking with someone you do not consider as obligated to analyze you. Of course, I will not analyze aloud you if you do not wish, but if I am acting in my professional capacity, that becomes more complicated. We can simply have conversations, you can keep your appointment time, but I will not officially be your psychiatrist.”

Will wanted to laugh. He wanted to storm out in anger. He wanted to cry. He had no idea how he should react to such a ridiculous situation.

“You are a strange psychiatrist,” Will said dumbly.

The doctor smiled in reply.

Expectations

Will was back in the office despite the chief's concerns. He hated being at home alone with nothing to do. He would go fishing, but he didn't live close enough to a river for that to be a realistic hobby for him at the moment.

Will dropped into his chair and slid up to his desk. He didn't have any files today, probably because the chief still thought he needed some time off, but he did still have the papers on Matthew.

Will reclined in the chair to read them over.

The rookie had passed all the required screening, though Will knew that meant very little in the way of his actual mental place. He had passed, after all, and he knew very well he was less than perfectly stable.

Matthew had also scored very well on all the assessments, and performed well in the field up to that point, so Will thought he would turn out to be a very good officer if he could just keep his head in the game.

A figure appeared at the side of his desk and Will internally sighed. Even think of the devil and he shall appear, apparently, Will thought.

Looking up, Will was met by an overly friendly smile on Matthew's face.

"I see you're reading through my file," he commented, nodding to the papers in Will's hand, "I hope everything seems in order for you."

Will tossed the papers back onto the desk and nodded.

"You have done well up 'till now," he agreed, "Though that doesn't really mean you will be able to stand being my partner. People don't tend to like me. I'm blunt and abrasive."

Matthew's smile grew wider.

"Just from talking with you these few times, I feel like I will be able to handle it. I have enjoyed it, and I think we could be a very good pair."

Will raised an eyebrow. Matthew didn't seem like he was just trying to pander to Will and make him like him, but he may have been. He did seem to actually be excited at the prospect of working with Will, so he took that as a good sign.

"Well, once my arm mends up, we'll see how good you really are in the field. Paper reports don't impress me until I see the real thing," He said, sitting at the desk properly. He pulled out a notebook and a pen so that he would have something to keep him busy once Matthew left.

Matthew chuckled lightly, making Will give him a quizzical glance.

“I’m glad to hear that,” Matthew explained, “I feel like too many officers are easy to convince with just a number. You really are a great detective.”

Will grunted in a sort of approval and agreement. He waved away the younger man and got to work on anything he could snatch from his files. He needed to keep his mind busy, or he would just get frustrated at being on desk duty.

“So where are you from, Doctor Lecter?” Will asked, wandering around the office.

Hannibal Lecter was seated at his desk instead of the chair he had previously occupied. He seemed to be sketching something as they spoke, and Will actually felt like it was a comfortable, friendly conversation. The good doctor wasn’t even taking notes on things Will said.

“Natively, Lithuania, though I spent many years in Paris, and some in Italy, before coming to the United States,” The doctor answered, glancing up to watch Will react.

Will nodded in consideration.

“You’re more well traveled than I am, then,” Will said, scanning over the shelves of books, “I’ve never really been out of the States.”

“You should know I do not expect you to continue using my official title,” Doctor Lecter said, “I have not referred to you as Detective Graham since our first conversation. You may call me Hannibal.”

Will scrunched his nose in a half grimace. He wasn’t sure if he did want to. It seemed too friendly for him. He didn’t typically have many people he was on equal footing with.

“I think I’m more comfortable the less personal we are. I’m not interested in making friends, Doctor.”

Hannibal nodded, though he seemed a bit disappointed. He quirked his lips as he added a few pencil strokes to his paper.

Will pulled a book down from the shelf. It felt heavy, and fairly old, in his hands. The cover was sleek leather, but it had clearly been read through by the creases in the binding. He laid it on his hand and let it fall open to whatever page had been most read.

“You like poetry?” Will asked casually, reading a few lines. It was in french, but from what Will could make out from his minimal knowledge, it was recognizable.

Hannibal looked up at the book he was holding and nodded.

“I do try to keep myself well versed in whatever I can. I think I procured that book while in Paris. It was one of my uncle’s books I believe. You speak french?”

Will shrugged in reply to the question.

“I’ve moved around through the south,” he explained, “It’s helpful if you’re in Louisiana.”

Hannibal nodded again as if he were making a mental note.

Will huffed lightly, thinking Hannibal was probably taking notes of what he said, if not physically, then mentally.

“What did you do in Paris?” Will asked, hoping he was doing small talk correctly. He had never been very good at it, but Hannibal seemed to appreciate it when he at least made the effort.

Hannibal turned his eyes back to his sketch.

“I studied in a medical school for many years,” he replied.

Will didn’t know what to do in response, so he placed the book back on the shelf.

“You don’t practice medicine now,” Will observed, looking over Hannibal while his gaze was averted, “Any particular reason?”

Hannibal suspended his pencil between his two hands and seemed to consider the question.

“I find work in psychiatry more rewarding. No one has died as a result of my treatment as of yet, and I get to monitor improvements in my patient’s conditions. I think you find your work rewarding to you, do you not?” Hannibal asked, turning the conversation back to Will, as expected.

Will scanned over more titles in several languages.

“I guess so. I don’t really get to watch people get better, so not in the same way you do, but there is something about it that seems fulfilling in a way,” Will admitted.

Hannibal watched Will in silence for a moment, and Will realized the silence was comfortable, which was odd for him.

“You appreciate justice,” Hannibal stated, “Doing bad things to bad people makes you feel good.”

Will shrugged.

“I don’t necessarily think I do bad things to them,” Will defended, “just unpleasant. At least for them. You have a strange way of doing things. Other psychiatrists aren’t so open about their analysis. They’re very secretive. You seem to like having it be a discussion.”

Hannibal nodded.

“I think there is very little point to having discussion of mental health unless I share what I think. If I am not honest with you, how can I expect honesty in return?”

Will thought that was pretty damn considerate, and made him even more comfortable talking to Hannibal.

“I guess other psychiatrists don’t want to plant ideas in their patients’ heads. They want the patient to have their own ideas, separate from theirs. The way you do things allows for compromise. Your patients can bounce ideas off of you, and you can help them come to a better understanding of themselves,” Will guessed aloud, “I think I like that better. I want to know what people think about me.”

Hannibal tilted his head, having evidently abandoned his sketch for the time.

“You are concerned with people’s perception of you,” He said, “yet you make very little effort to shape what that may be.”

Will chuckled.

“I don’t want to give anyone false expectations,” He said, “But I do want to know what I look like in the eyes of others.”

Hannibal turned his gaze down in contemplation, scanning over his sketch without seeing it.

“You can enter the mind of almost anyone. Despite that, you prefer to have people be honest with you. Do you find your empathy feels intrusive?” Hannibal asked.

Will frowned. He hadn’t exactly put words to it before, but he thought that sounded about right. He walked along the wall, putting some distance between himself and Hannibal.

“I have limited shelf space,” He lied, “I have to leave room in my head for the minds of criminals. I don’t have room to get into the head of everyone I meet, just so I can know if they like me or not.”

Hannibal resumed his drawing, but Will thought he saw the flicker of a frown on his lips.

“Speaking with a psychiatrist cannot do you any good if you refuse to be honest with me, Will,” he said, “I can only wonder why you felt the need to lie about this.”

Will sighed, rubbing a hand over his face.

“Well, I don’t like people in my head,” he snapped, “So why would anyone like me in theirs? I lied because you’re getting into my head, because you’re a psychiatrist, and I don’t like it. I told you I don’t like psychiatrists.”

“I am sorry you feel that way. What kind of false expectations do you think you might instill in people you meet if you try to be more likable?” Hannibal asked.

Will grimaced.

“I’m not very likable, for one,” he said, “I think the only way for me to really seem likable is if I pretend that I can’t see everything that I can see. People are put off by the fact that I can

put myself into their heads, so I would have to act like I can't. Eventually, people will find out, so there's really no point in trying to make fake friends that way."

Hannibal nodded, seeming to have been expecting a similar answer.

"You believe it is more beneficial to you if you allow people to dislike you before they have the opportunity to find what about you they may like," he said, "but you still crave approval and friendship, as all humans do."

Will shrugged.

"Like you said, everyone wants to have friends, or people they are friendly with. I'm used to not having anyone like that in my life though. Besides, it's easier that way. I don't have obligations to please, or concerns over their preferences. I just have me and my dogs."

Invitations

Will was practicing his aim. The dull pain in his shoulder made the practice uncomfortable, but he was too determined to let that deter him. He had been given some exercises to do to aid the healing process, but he frequently forgot to do them, so his shoulder bothered him more than it would have.

His stance was more shaky and his aim was the worst it had ever been, and he was frustrated.

He had always worried about having the courage to pull the trigger on another person, but he had found that he didn't typically need to aim at their torso or head in order to subdue them. He usually went for their legs, so he didn't have to have a death on his conscience.

Matthew had walked in a few moments before and probably thought Will hadn't noticed. He watched with clinical curiosity.

Will turned to him as he removed the hearing protection.

"Trying to figure out the best way to shoot by watching a guy who got shot?" Will asked flatly.

Matthew smiled, realizing Will had known he was there.

"Watching to see how you compensate for your injury, sir," he replied. His smile was a bit unnerving, though Will supposed he wasn't really in the position to judge.

"I don't suppose you have any clever suggestions, do you?" Will asked.

It was a subtle test of the rookie, as well as a genuine desire for any help he could offer. Seeing a stance made it easier to correct than being the one needing correction.

Matthew seemed to consider this for a moment before he stepped a bit further toward Will.

"Your shoulders are tense. You should try to relax a bit more, and angle your feet a bit more apart. The tension makes your arms tremble with the effort."

Will raised an eyebrow before turning and slipping the ear protection back on. He replaced the clip and carefully adjusted his stance the way Matthew had suggested.

He sent a few rounds at the target and nodded with satisfaction.

Turning back to Matthew, Will gave him a nod.

"Well done. Do you need something, or really just observing?" He asked.

Matthew shook his head.

“You’re almost back in the field, so I thought we should get to know each other better before we have to have each other’s backs,” he replied calmly. He seemed completely pleased that he had been able to help Will, and Will thought he would have to have some pride knocked out of him sooner or later.

“I’m not one for socializing, in case you hadn’t heard, so what were you planning?” Will asked. His voice was gruff and he knew he was probably being a bit more harsh than he needed to be, but he wanted the kid to be prepared.

Matthew propped his hip up against one of the shelves that were for keeping the gear on and folded his arms. He seemed amused rather than upset, which made Will more hopeful that he would stick around.

“Do anything for fun when you’re off duty?” He asked.

Will was putting away the gear he had been using and shrugged, keeping his natural frown in place.

“I take care of my dogs, mostly,” he replied, giving Matthew a calculating glance, “and if you’re suggesting we go out together, like friends or whatever, no. I don’t do that kind of thing, and you are definitely not invited over to meet my dogs. I keep home and work separate, thank you.”

Matthew nodded as if he had expected as much.

“I was just curious. Guy like you has to have some interesting hobbies, so I wondered. I didn’t expect you to want to go out either,” he said, “but I could go get us some food if you want. I’m off the clock, so I’d bring it back for you.”

Will took stock of his hunger, noticing guiltily that he hadn’t eaten anything that day. He was well and truly hungry, so he nodded grudgingly.

“If you’re paying,” he agreed, “I’ll be at my desk when you get back, since I’m still on office duty for a few days.”

Matthew smiled and nodded.

“As a bit of a test, why don’t I try to guess what you’ll like?” He asked, snapping his fingers excitedly, “I’m usually pretty good at it.”

Will studied him with a frown. He probably was, but he definitely had some pride that could take a few notches down.

“Fine, do what you like. Nothing fancy though, I don’t want to feel like I owe you.”

Matthew nodded again before excusing himself and leaving.

Will shook his head in exasperated amusement.

The things rookies did to try and impress the older detectives.

Will begrudgingly acknowledged that Matthew had guessed pretty well on what he would like to eat.

They each ate out of their takeout boxes in relative silence as Will glanced over some more crime scene photos.

Since they were probably going to be assigned to the case he was looking at, Will slid a few pictures closer to Matthew.

Matthew glanced at them before looking up at Will with his eyebrows raised. Will waved to the pictures in an invitation to look, and leaned back in the chair, taking up his chopsticks again as he watched his young partner.

“Tell me what you think,” Will said, lifting some noodles to his mouth.

Matthew looked over the pictures, careful not to touch them, as if he was unsure of how far his permission extended regarding them.

“It’s very precise,” he said carefully, “I would almost use the word surgical.”

Will tipped his head.

“Why wouldn’t you?” he asked.

Matthew pressed his lips together and furrowed his brow.

“They bled too much. The killer didn’t stop them from bleeding, like most surgeons would, even if their intent was to kill. It's messy."

Will nodded. He was smart, but still wrong. Will knew as much as that. The cuts were surgical, and the killer had wanted them to bleed exactly that much.

The skin from the man’s abdomen had been peeled away in segments as shapes, to give the impression of a flower in bloom. The blood had flowed out around it and down, as if it had rained onto the blossom and watered the earth. This was the work of the Ripper, and Will knew he was the only one who would see it.

“See anything else?” Will asked, not voicing his thoughts in favor of letting the rookie learn from experience.

Matthew looked over the photos again, a frown on his face as if he could sense Will’s thoughts.

“I doubt he left much behind. The scene is nearly immaculate. He only left what he wanted to have found, in the way he wanted it seen. He has probably done stuff like this before,” Matthew said.

He lifted his gaze up to Will, who didn't meet it. Instead, Will put more food into his mouth while staring at the pictures.

"You're certainly right about that," he said quietly.

"What do you see, in the mind of this killer?" Hannibal asked curiously.

Will raised an eyebrow at him in a friendly question.

"The Chesapeake Ripper, you mean?" he asked, poking Hannibal with the knowledge that everyone else refused to accept.

Hannibal nodded.

"He doesn't kill recklessly, or out of anger," Will said, letting his eyes go unfocused. He could see all the scenes in the blurs of his vision, clear as if he were there, but overlaid with his current reality. "He does it out of some sort of self-righteousness. He is merely ridding the world of a pest, and elevating their form to his own type of temporary art."

Hannibal's gaze was intense when Will met it. He was fixed on Will, as if he could see his mind through the window of his eyes and find the source of his knowledge.

"How does he choose his victims?" He asked, his gaze never wavering.

Will frowned and shook his head in frustration.

"It could be anything," he said gruffly, "They might be people who can't play an instrument, or draw well, or he deems to be stupid. He's not choosing people who deserve to die, just ones that he thinks we are better without for some reason. Hell, they might even just be people he sees as rude, for all I know."

The corners of Hannibal's mouth twitched up in a half smile that was almost a smirk. He seemed pleased with Will's words, for whatever reason.

"A noble purpose," he stated, "To rid the world of the tasteless."

Will scrunched his nose and gave Hannibal a confused stare.

"Most people would find that terrifying and horrible," Will said slowly, studying Hannibal carefully, "But you can see the sense in it."

Hannibal nodded slightly, meeting Will's gaze steadily.

"And you can see the beauty in it," he replied.

Will barked out a laugh.

“If I couldn’t, I’d probably be out of a job,” he said, “Seeing what the killer sees is my whole thing, after all.”

Hannibal tipped his head, intrigued.

“And yet that is not the only way that you see it,” he observed.

Will was growing uncomfortable under his gaze and he stood up to wander around the office.

“What other ways do you suppose I see it?” he asked, a tremor in his voice despite himself. He truly wanted to hear what Hannibal could tell.

Hannibal also stood, walking to his desk and moving a few of his sketches around.

“You can relate to the darkness in their minds, and see through their eyes,” he said, “but it is the darkness in your own mind that allows you to see their actions clearly. It is this darkness that scares you, because you can see the beauty in their work without being in their heads.”

Will grimaced. Hannibal was more perceptive than most, and he was getting very close to home with his observations.

“Do you think I enjoy seeing deaths?” he asked defensively, but feeling guilty all the same.

Hannibal hummed in disagreement.

“I do not think you enjoy it, though I would not say that you are incapable of it. You feel obligated to be disgusted by the actions, and feel guilty that it does not come naturally to you.”

Will felt like he couldn’t breathe. How the hell could Hannibal tell? He had never met anyone who could analyze him like that. It was usually the other way around, and he was making people uncomfortable.

“Will?”

Will snapped back to reality, realizing he had been quiet for a bit longer than was acceptable.

“Sorry, did you say something else?” Will asked sheepishly.

Hannibal’s face flickered with concern before it smoothed out to his usual unaffected expression.

“I asked if you would join me for dinner,” he stated, as if it was a completely normal thing, “One of my hobbies is cooking, and I enjoy treating my friends to dinner every so often.”

Will blinked up at him.

“What?” He said, no other words coming to his tongue in that moment.

Hannibal smiled slightly and pleasantly.

“I would think this Friday is likely best for you, is that correct?” He asked, continuing as if Will had accepted.

Will tried to shake the fog from his mind and focus. This was beyond weird.

“Uh, yeah, I guess. I don’t think I’m very good company, though,” he said.

Hannibal stared at him sincerely.

“I disagree, but if it worries you, there will be no other guests on this occasion, so you only have me to disappoint,” he said, a teasing smile playing over his features.

Will managed a dry chuckle, the nervousness still trickling into his stomach.

“Alright, fine, but you’re still a strange psychiatrist.”

Will flexed his shoulder, gauging the ache that remained. It was bearable, and that was all he needed.

Matthew was in the passenger seat next to him as Will cruised through the streets. For once, Franklyn would have been right about him on the streets, keeping people safe. Will hated it.

“Picture 3,1,2,” Will said, “Tell me what you see.”

Matthew pulled out the picture, and Will recalled it to the front of his mind while he watched the road.

Matthew took a moment to look over the picture before answering.

“The cuts on the body are delicate, and precise. A piece of skin, likely from the body is on the ground about ten inches from the shoulder of the body, lying on top of the bloodstains. There is also a lock of hair clasped in the hand of the victim. Is there something I am supposed to be looking for, Sir?”

Will ground his teeth. He wanted someone to see what he saw. He wanted someone else to figure it out. Everything screamed of the Ripper. It was as if he had carved his name into the body, and Will was the only one who could see it.

“I want to see how good your eyes are for details,” Will answered, “So it’s not about any detail in particular. I want to see how many details you see together.”

Matthew nodded, his ever-present grin stuck to his face.

“That’s why they call you the bloodhound,” he said, “You can see everything, and it means something to you. I bet you already know so much about this killer that I can’t even begin to see.”

Will huffed unhappily.

Matthew was obsessed with Will's street rep, and it was getting to be annoying. He had never been very fond of being so well known in the public eye, but he had to deal with it.

"So, what can you see?" Will asked gruffly.

"Well, this is definitely not a first time kill," Matthew began, "though you already knew that much. It doesn't seem to match any other scenes we have found, so he might have hidden the others better, or not made a spectacle of them. He is probably trying to be symbolic with the way he displayed the body, so it might have some sort of meaning or hidden message behind it."

Will nodded. That was what he was trying to figure out. Everything always meant something with the Ripper.

Will hit the brakes sharply as a car pulled an illegal turn and cut them off. He cursed loudly and flicked the lights on as he followed the reckless driver.

Will tossed the radio to his rookie partner.

"Call this in," he ordered, "and we'll see how well you can handle the mundane stuff."

Matthew spoke sharply over the radio as the car pulled to the side of the road in front of them. Will pulled up behind and waved for Matthew to get out of the car with him.

Dinner

Will looked at himself in the mirror. He hadn't asked about any specific wardrobe requirements, but Dr. Lecter hadn't mentioned any, so he thought he wouldn't be too surprised when Will showed up in his street clothes. He had combed his hair better than he usually did, feeling the urge to do something for his appearance.

Bud tipped his head at Will, panting and wagging his tail. He probably thought they were going out. Will shook his head at the small dog.

"Sorry Bud. I'm not taking you with me tonight. I don't think Dr. Lecter is a dog person," he said.

Rosco was sitting on the couch with his head on his paws. He didn't seem overly interested in Will's activities, but Will saw the curious glint in his eyes as they tracked his movements.

"I know. I don't go out much. I'm not sure what to expect either. I usually know what to expect from the psychiatrist type, but Dr. Lecter isn't the usual kind. Everything he does is hard to see coming."

Will looked himself over once more before going out the door and locking it behind him.

The fact that Franklyn was in the hall should not have been a surprise to Will, but he flinched when he heard his voice.

"Will!" Franklyn said happily, "you don't go out much after work. Where are you headed?"

Will stretched a fake smile over his face and turned to his neighbor.

Did Franklyn even spend time in his own apartment, or did he wait in the hall to watch everyone else?

"I'm going out to meet a friend," Will answered curtly, hoping to everything in heaven and hell that he wouldn't ask about it any more.

Franklyn smiled broadly, sweeping his eyes over Will assessingly.

"Don't drink too much," he said, "We wouldn't want anything to happen to you. You gotta keep the scum off the streets."

The tone was friendly, but betrayed Franklyn's obsessive interest in Will's affairs. He had always been nice, but after learning that Will was "the Bloodhound" he had become intrusive. Will could see himself on some sort of pedestal in Franklyn's eyes, and he hated it. He just wanted to be left alone.

"Thanks. I'll do my best."

Honestly, he didn't expect there to be any kind of alcohol that he would choose to indulge in at the dinner, but he wasn't sure what to expect.

Will brushed past Franklyn and hurried to his car. Something about Franklyn had always set him on edge. He knew his neighbor was well-intentioned, but he felt like a leech at times.

Will started the car and headed to the address he had been given.

Looking up at the house, Will found he was largely unsurprised at the large and ornate appearance. Of course, Hannibal Lecter lived like the high society member he looked like.

Will checked the time and wondered briefly how early would be considered too early, and how late would be considered too late. It didn't matter all that much, as he was only three minutes earlier than the agreed time, and he felt that was a safe bet either way.

As he knocked, Will felt a pang of anxiety at the odd situation, but the door opened and he was met with a grin from Doctor Lecter.

"Good evening, Will," he said smoothly, "Please come in."

Will offered a polite smile and nodded. Doctor Lecter stepped aside as Will stepped in. He was wearing an apron, and his suit was discarded but for his white dress shirt, that had the sleeves rolled up to his elbows.

"Please, join me in the kitchen. Dinner is almost ready, but I have a few final things to do, and I would despair to leave you alone for any time while you are here," Lecter said.

Will thought that was really, really weird, but he nodded and followed the doctor to the kitchen.

The room was large and immaculate. Every surface was clean and shining. Will wasn't sure how Doctor Lecter did it, but it didn't feel oppressive like he would have expected. Despite it's sterile and ornate appearance, Will felt comfortable enough to lean against one of the counters as the doctor moved about.

"You are welcome to sit down as I work," Hannibal said, gesturing to a small table with chairs that sat in the corner.

Will shrugged.

"No thanks," he said, "I'm fine right here."

The corners of the psychiatrist's mouth twitched up in an amused smile as he worked.

"Is that a habit of keeping yourself in a position to be able to run or defend yourself, or simply a personal preference?" he asked.

Will tipped his head and considered.

“A bit of both,” he said, “I’m not very familiar with you, so I’m not ready to be too easy with you just yet.”

Hannibal nodded.

“I wonder if there are very many in your life whom you would deem worthy of your ease in their presence,” he said.

Will wasn’t happy with how easily Hannibal could interpret his words and see into his life. It was probably as unsettling to him as his own abilities were to everyone else.

He huffed.

“I didn’t realize this was just another session for you,” he said to his psychiatrist.

Hannibal lifted the plates up and smiled minutely.

“It is not. I am simply curious. You are not obligated to reply to my wonderings, and you are welcome to change the subject if you wish. Now, please come into the dining room.”

Will frowned, but followed where Hannibal led.

The dining room was just as fancy as he should have expected, but the decor was interesting. He was intrigued but the copy of Leda and the Swan that hung on one wall, and the somewhat morbid choices in other places. There were delicate skulls and bones interwoven into the centerpiece, and Will was sure this was not normal for people who lived the way Hannibal did.

Hannibal set the plates down and pulled Will’s chair out for him. Will felt entirely uncomfortable and awkward, but he sat and waited for Hannibal to sit down. Hannibal smiled and nodded to the plate in front of Will, bidding him to eat.

Will remembered that he read somewhere that it was good etiquette to wait until your guest began eating to eat anything yourself. He blinked and looked down at his plate.

Will had no idea what he was looking at, but he picked up a forkful and carefully began eating.

Whatever it was, Will decided he was a fan. The flavors popped over his tongue and mingled together in a way that he had never tasted. This was much more fancy than anything he would have eaten on a normal day.

“Alright,” Will said once Hannibal had taken a bite, “So, you’re a psychiatrist, an artist, and an expert at cooking. Any other random talents you have that you haven’t had the opportunity to show off yet?”

Hannibal hummed quietly, smirking slightly.

“I play the harpsichord and the theremin, though I’m sure my success in that field is subjective,” He offered.

Will shook his head, taking another bite.

“Why did I even ask?” He said, “Of course. You’re some kind of fantasy from across the pond, I suppose. I bet you can’t do anything wrong.”

A beat after he had said it, Will realized how his words might sound.

He glanced up and saw genuine amusement in Hannibal’s maroon eyes. He swallowed quickly and cleared his throat.

“I, uh, that was weird,” he said eloquently.

Hannibal smiled.

“Not at all. I am pleased to hear you think so highly of me, despite not being very familiar with me as of yet,” he replied, “and a peek behind the curtain, to glimpse the inner workings of your mind, is always a pleasure.”

Will was not as comfortable with the interaction as Hannibal seemed to be, but he just nodded and continued eating.

“Graham, Chief wants you in his office. Play nice. He doesn't seem happy.”

Will glanced up at the other officer as they turned sharply and walked away. He flicked his eyes to the door of the Chief's office and thought quickly.

He had seen another man enter earlier that day and had yet to see him leave. He had never seen the man before, so he wasn't someone who could have a concern about Will from their own experience. He seemed like a commanding person, so he may be someone from higher up the chain who had a concern, or maybe Will had made a mistake on some paperwork.

Will readied himself, straightening his clothes and running a hand through his hair.

Approaching the door, Will heard a booming voice from inside.

“Sir,” Will said, standing at attention and facing the Chief. He studied the other man from his periphery.

The man studied him back.

“Detective Graham. This is agent Crawford. He works with the FBI. He has something he would like to talk to you about.

Will turned sharply to face the man.

He seemed soft, but his face betrayed experience. He must be with the psychology department.

“I hear you have a talent for the monsters.”

Will set his jaw and looked decidedly over the man’s head.

“That could be subjective, agent Crawford,” he replied stiffly.

“Meaning that you might not have talent, or they might not be monsters?” Crawford shot back, curious and intrusive.

“Both, sir. Either. I see them as men. There are no worse monsters than human beings.”

The slight shift in the edge of his vision let Will know the Chief was pleased with that answer.

“Well put,” Crawford replied, “what about the Chesapeake ripper?”

That stopped Will. He blinked and locked gazes with the agent. Crawford was studying him like a test subject.

“I haven't been on his case. He's for you to catch, I believe,” Will replied.

Crawford nodded.

“But how do you see him? I know you see him. I've been told so. What do you see?”

Sum up the ripper in so many words? Will paused, thinking. If he said the wrong thing, mistakes could be made, or faith could be lost.

“He is intentional. He is not reverting to his primal instincts as other killers do. He does not allow his cravings or emotions to control him. He is the master of his own actions. He sees himself as God. And he will not be caught, because of his superiority. He is shaping the world to fit his vision by exterminating the vermin from it, one at a time, and turning them into artistic tableaus.”

Will stopped. If he went any further, he might say something that would make him look either crazy or suspicious.

Crawford seemed satisfied with that answer. He nodded once to the Chief and left the room. He didn't offer Will another glance, and Will listened to his retreating footsteps.

When Will turned back to the Chief, he was met with a wide grin.

“Graham, I knew you were good, but that was unbelievable. You impressed Jack Crawford.”

He said the name like it held enormous weight, and Will wondered what he had just done.

“Sir, if I may, what was that about?” Will asked.

The Chief waved to the chair in front of him, bidding Will sit down. That was odd of him. He never asked his officers to sit unless they were new, or doing very poorly.

A file was passed across the desk to Will and he was invited to look.

The images pierced Will's mind and clung to his thoughts like the barbs of a fishhook. It was the Ripper. He knew it was, and if the questioning was anything to go by, the FBI knew it too.

Matching the previous scene Will had looked at, this seemed to have a flower theme. There were lilies grafted into the veins of the victims hands and wrists. She had morning glories crawling up her legs and roses sprouting from her lips. Flower petals were scattered around her and in her hair.

"That's two, and if he stays with his pattern, we're expecting one more in this sounder."

Will realized with a start that he had never used the word sounder when referring to the Ripper before. He had always thought it, but never said it aloud.

Glancing up to the chief, he didn't see any evidence that he was disturbed by his slip.

"And that's why Crawford came to me. You know your reputation typically precedes you," chief hinted.

Will grimaced.

"Yeah. Unfortunately."

Chief nodded.

"Well, apparently that even extends to the FBI. When this one showed up, they knew it was the Ripper, and they knew you had tried to call attention to that first one. I should be shot for not listening to you about that. They want you to work with them to catch this psycho. I all but order you to accept."

Will frowned.

"I'm not a profiler," he contended, "I'm a detective. They have the best of the best. They're the FBI. I can't imagine I'll be much help."

Chief shrugged.

"Crawford says they need some fresh blood, and they want you. This could be huge for you, and I fully support it. Doctor Lecter tells me you have been doing very well, though he won't go into specifics. Confidentiality, and all that."

Will nodded. It was good to know Hannibal wasn't telling everyone how crazy he is.

"What do I do from here, sir?" He asked.

Chief grinned.

“Be here early tomorrow, and Crawford will give you the breakdown. If anyone can catch this guy, I know you can.”

Will wasn't so sure about that. They had the best of the FBI on the case, and they had for a while. He didn't make mistakes, and he was unpredictable. The Ripper wouldn't be caught unless he chose to be.

With Respect

Will was early, and ready. Whatever Agent Crawford was going to tell him, he was as prepared as he could be. Chief seemed a bit jumpy, turning and starting at every footstep that passed outside his office.

Will stood with perfect attention, listening carefully. He wasn't on edge, because whatever happened next would be completely up to Agent Crawford.

The heavy footsteps approached the door and Will turned slowly to meet him. When the man walked in, he stared directly at Will, who looked decidedly over his head to avoid his eyes.

“Good morning, Agent Crawford,” Will said, nodding lightly.

The agent nodded back and turned to the chief.

“So you told him what he's agreeing to?”

Chief nodded sharply.

“Everything I had clearance to give him, I did. He knows what you want him to do.”

Will felt a bit irked by the display.

“With respect, Agent Crawford, I am right here. You might have asked me if I know what you want, instead of treating me like a trainee with an ego. I'm the one you asked to help you. Not chief.”

Agent Crawford turned to Will with an amused look.

“With respect, you can call me Jack. Hearing Agent Crawford all the time will get old. You're right. Tell me what you know about what I want.”

Will straightened.

“The Ripper has started on another sounder, and we should be expecting one more kill before the cycle ends. You want a new set of eyes and a fresh opinion. You came to me because of my reputation, and the fact that I knew the sounder had started before anyone would believe me.”

Jack raised an eyebrow, but nodded.

“Why do you use the word sounder?” He asked.

Will paused a moment, trying to find the best wording.

“Because,” he started slowly, “that is the term for a group of pigs. That is how the Ripper sees his victims. He sees them as livestock, or pests. Sounder is the most accurate term if you

want me to be getting into his head."

Jack smiled, which seemed to surprise the chief.

"Then you're in. You've got more in your head about these killings than most of my team have gotten from our years of work. Come with me so I can set you up in an office in Quantico. Get your stuff if you need anything."

Jack headed out the door quickly, and Will shrugged to chief Sutcliff before following after. He had a book full of notes in his desk that he snatched before he followed Jack out to the parking lot, but everything else he needed was in his head.

"I want you to ride with me," Jack said, "give your keys to one of my agents so they can bring your car. I know there are going to be some things we need to discuss."

Will nodded and handed his keys to a young agent Jack had summoned. She seemed enchanted to be coming face to face with Will, though she probably only knew him as the bloodhound. His reputation was something that could be bothersome at times.

Once they were in the car, Jack started talking.

"I don't want you getting any ideas about your importance to the investigation. We'll catch this bastard with or without you, so don't cause any trouble. I don't need you, I just think it'll go faster with you on board."

Will nodded.

He wasn't disillusioned about what Jack would treat him like. After a few days, he would be considered a part of the team, and Jack would treat him just like the rest of his agents. Probably like delinquent kids if this agent's reputation was anything to go by. Will knew, though, that it was mostly an act to keep them in line. Jack had to always give the impression of being in total control. He was the head of the department, after all.

"I want to be able to talk to my psychiatrist about the cases," Will said, almost surprising himself.

Jack paused to consider this.

"Sutcliff told me you were seeing a shrink. I can give them clearance for the cases, but I need to know they are going to keep it confidential. I don't need the press getting a hold of anything more than we give them."

Will nodded.

"I'm sure Doctor Lecter can keep a secret. He's pretty well known, so you can get a character reference from someone, I'm sure. Even Chief could vouch for him. They know each other."

Jack huffed, apparently satisfied.

“I think your chief might begrudge us a bit if we keep you too much, so you are only to work on days when we call you in. I won’t always be able to give you advanced notice, but your chief knows all of this already. You can work from the station the rest of the time. I'm having you called in for a couple days starting now, to get you started.”

They should only be expecting one more scene, and that wouldn’t take too long to profile. They shouldn’t be expecting to catch the Ripper so quickly, unless they already had something significant. Since they were calling Will in, they obviously didn’t.

“You want me to work on other cases too,” Will said, turning to Jack, “other than the Ripper case.”

Jack smirked, like he had just won a bet with someone.

“We get all types of cases here, Will. There are bound to be some that you can be useful for. High-profile, life on the line, kind of cases. You will be saving lives if you turn out to be as useful as I think you will.”

Will wanted to roll his eyes at him. Surely the FBI wasn’t that much in want of a profiler. They should have plenty of far more experienced agents at their disposal. Will was saving lives from where he was. He supposed it was some consolation that he would be able to do both, and not only work on the cases for the FBI.

When they pulled up to the building, Will felt Jack suddenly grow serious beside him. This was where his friendly facade shifted into his authoritative one. He was in charge, and he needed to seem it.

“These are Jimmy Price and Brian Zeller,” Jack introduced, gesturing to a pair of agents in lab coats who glanced up with twin expressions and mirror waves.

“And this is Beverly Katz. They are the science team, so they will be giving you all the evidence. It’s your job to put the pieces together.”

Will nodded.

“Interpret the evidence and get into the mind of the killer. I’m familiar with how that works, Jack. Like I said, I’m not a trainee.”

Jack frowned at him for the comment, but Will knew he was pleased.

They had the most recent body on one of the tables, and the smell had been masked by chemicals. She had been opened to discover what evidence might be on the inside.

“Organs missing?” Will asked, peering over the body.

The shorter man, Price, raised his eyebrows and nodded.

“Kidneys,” he said, “And the Ripper knew what they were doing too. One incision to get at both of them, without making it too obvious. Right here at the side. That’s how we knew where to look once we opened her up further.”

Will nodded. That seemed to be a theme with the ripper kills, though he didn't have access to all of the cases yet. He really wanted to see the other kills.

"The lilies were grafted in, which means he really took his time. He doesn't half do anything."

Will had to agree with that. An artistic personality did not lend to laziness. The Ripper was anything but lazy.

Jack showed him to his new "office", which was just a room next to the labs which had a desk and chair. There wasn't much room, but Will didn't need much.

"Anything you need, within reason, I can get you," Jack said, standing in the doorway as Will looked around.

Will set his notes on the desk and nodded.

"I'd like a cork board, if one can be spared," Will said, "and obviously I'm going to need the files on the Ripper kills. As many as you have, please."

Jack nodded.

"That all lands firmly within reason. I can get you those. Try not to make a habit of smart mouthing me, or we're going to have a problem. Just get your work done, and don't cause problems. That's all I ask."

Will chuffed lightly, nodding and turning away to continue his observation of his new space.

Jack wanted more from him than just that, but it was subtext. Jack wouldn't, or possibly couldn't, voice what he wanted Will to accomplish while working with them. Will had a high bar that he needed to meet, but at the moment it was still far within his reach. Jack would remedy that soon enough.

His office was much more private than anything he had at the station, since he just had a desk that anyone could walk up to or see from across the room if they wanted to there. He thought he would like it, having a space to himself, where he could do what he needed to without being interrupted constantly.

With Intent

“I have been asked to work with the FBI on the Ripper case,” Will said, reading a new row of book titles to himself.

Hannibal looked up at him with interest.

“Is that so?” he mused, “I hadn’t thought they were desperate enough to go looking for local detectives to do their work for them quite yet.”

Will huffed a laugh.

“You’ll be getting clearance for the case, so I can talk to you about it,” Will continued, “and the entire FBI might not be desperate, but the head of the Behavioral science unit is. Jack must have some personal interest in this case. He doesn’t even like me that much, but he even gave me my own office to work from while I’m consulting. I’d say that qualifies as desperate.”

Hannibal smiled lightly.

“I can imagine having a private workplace is quite an incentive for you,” he said, “as you will not be required to be around others as you do the bulk of your work. I would guess it is near enough to the labs to be convenient, though.”

Will nodded, unable to completely hide the smile pulling at his lips.

“Right next door. I've never had a private office of any sort, so that's going to be new.”

Hannibal nodded.

“What was Andrew’s reaction to this offer?” He asked.

Will rubbed at the back of his neck, wandering around a bit.

“He basically ordered me to accept. He seems more excited for me to work with the FBI than anyone who's actually involved. I know what he's thinking, but I can't help being worried he's talking me up too much to others.”

“Are you worried that they may have too high of expectations, or simply the wrong ones?”

Will stopped in his tracks. That was an odd way of putting it, though he supposed it wasn't entirely inaccurate.

“Perhaps a bit of both,” Will agreed, “I'm afraid he doesn't understand what it is I do, and so then neither does anyone he has talked to. He seems to think I'm a wizard, or something. I don't know what to expect.”

Hannibal hummed in thought.

“For someone so used to having your reputation precede you, you seem terribly nonplussed by the notion,” Hannibal noted.

Will sighed.

“I've never liked having people know who I am before they meet me, but the idea that people as high up as the FBI are hearing about me is unsettling. Not to mention that most of my rep doesn't originate from someone who knows me personally. It's different.”

Hannibal nodded.

“No doubt. In giving me clearance for the cases, are you hoping to gain some insight through our discussions, or do you expect that simply having a surface to bounce ideas off will aid you in the investigation?”

Will shot Hannibal an annoyed look. Hannibal was clever enough to know what he expected. He just wanted to hear Will say it.

“You’re smarter than that,” he reprimanded, “you know I think you’ll be helpful. If you’re offended by any of that, then I could just ask Jack to consult you directly. Then we could discuss them anyway.”

Hannibal smiled.

“I am not offended. I am pleased to have already earned that level of trust from someone who is so slow to trust people that it seems to be affecting your ability to retain a partner in the force.”

Will shrugged.

“It usually has less to do with a lack of trust on my part, and more to do with other people not liking or trusting me. They notice that I’m closed off, so they don’t feel comfortable. It’s not really my fault. You already knew all of that, though. You just like to elicit a response.”

Hannibal’s smile grew, and it was more genuine now. His eyes sparkled with it.

“I feel as though you think me childish,” he remarked.

Will raised his eyebrows, forcing his face to retain a stern expression despite the smile pulling at his lips.

“I think you are childish, but that I’m the first one to call you out on it. I think it amuses you that I know what you are doing, while you continue to do it regardless.”

Hannibal stood up from his desk and walked around it to stand next to Will, turning to also look at the rows of books. There was a touch of concern in his actions, which Will wasn’t sure he knew the justification for.

“Do you think you are a source of amusement for me, Will?” he asked.

Will tapped his fingers on his leg absently. He could see far too much in Hannibal's eyes when they were turned to himself, and he wasn't sure what he was going to point out just yet. There were still things he didn't understand.

"I don't think that's all I am to you, if that's what you are asking. I think there are things about me that amuse you, though."

Hannibal hummed.

"What about you might amuse me?" He asked, sounding like he was laughing at Will.

Will set his jaw, and turned away from Hannibal, trying not to show that he had noticed the way Hannibal poked at him.

"You like to say things and watch me work through your words. It amuses you that I can understand what you are not saying. You wind me up and watch me go."

Hannibal stepped away from Will, just a bit. His shoes making soft scuffing sounds on the carpet.

"I think you misunderstand me," he said, sounding as if the words came with more difficulty than usual, "I do not do these things to amuse myself."

Will furrowed his brow, having to force his head not to turn and look at the other man. Hannibal was making it awfully hard for Will to avoid confronting what he could see in his eyes.

"You asked me once if I feel my empathy is intrusive when I use it on others," Will said.

Hannibal hummed in agreement.

"Well, I do. I try not to get into the heads of other people, and I don't want them in mine. I especially don't get into the heads of people I want to be friends with," Will said, glancing at Hannibal now. The other man didn't seem to be quite following where Will was going with this.

"So," Will continued, taking a deep breath, "I don't know why it surprises you that I haven't gotten into your head. I want you to talk to me, not expect me to figure it all out."

Hannibal blinked, seemingly taken aback.

"My apologies. I thought you would only extend that courtesy to those who were not psychiatrists, since you have expressed your distaste for my profession," He explained.

Will rubbed a hand over his face, feeling tired by everything.

"You thought that since you're getting into my head, that I'd return the favor?" He asked.

Hannibal smiled minutely, but it seemed almost shy, if that word could ever be used to describe Hannibal.

“Obviously a poor assumption on my part,” He said.

Will laughed, and he felt tension leave his shoulders. Hannibal could understand him more easily than most, but he wasn’t magic. He still didn’t know everything.

“So, if you don’t do all that stuff just for your own amusement, why do you do it?”

Will stopped laughing, surprised at himself for having asked. He hadn’t meant to, but the sudden ease he had felt made his tongue loose. Hannibal smiled at him.

“On some level, I am amused,” Hannibal admitted, “but I confess I do not quite understand the extent of my reasoning. I long ago thought myself unable of feeling this way, and am delighted yet wary of having myself proven wrong at this time.”

Will felt like his heart might stop. He knew, in the back of his mind, what Hannibal meant. He couldn’t admit it to himself, though. He found his gaze locked with Hannibal’s, and everything he could see flooded his head and made thinking hard.

“Uh, so, with the FBI, I figured I’d be able to go over on my days off and really get into the files-” Will started. He knew his voice was shaking, and he couldn’t do anything about it.

Hannibal had started stepping closer to him, and Will stepped back slightly, feeling his face growing warm. His heel hit the bookshelf behind him, and he knew he was stuck. He could tell Hannibal to stop, and Hannibal would. The only problem was that Will couldn’t find it in him to say it.

Will could feel Hannibal’s warm breath on his brow, and the man smelled like earthy cologne and expensive wine.

“You truly can’t entirely help yourself from seeing into the minds of others,” Hannibal said softly, his chest a breath away from Will’s.

Will swallowed, his breathing shallow and quick. He wasn’t entirely sure what he wanted in the moment. He could imagine many different outcomes, but he didn’t know which one he would choose.

“I try to avoid eye contact,” Will confessed, “because eyes say too much, or nothing at all. They can be distracting.”

Hannibal smiled, humming a pleased sound that Will could almost feel, as close as they were.

“I wonder if I could help you focus.”

Before Will could respond, Hannibal had pressed his lips to Will’s. Will was completely flush with the bookcase to his back, and Hannibal wasn’t pressing him against it. Hannibal slowly lifted his hands, cupping one under Will’s chin and placing the other on Will’s hip.

Will felt like he might collapse right there. His breathing had stopped the moment Hannibal had started kissing him, but his heart was beating faster than could possibly be healthy. The

only thing that he was sure of was that he was actually fine with what was happening.

Hannibal pulled back and met Will's eyes again, seeking.

"You are going to need oxygen soon, Will," he said, a light note of amusement under his voice.

Will nodded and took a deliberate inhale. His heart was still fitting to break out of his chest, but thoughts were slowly returning to him.

"You have not been avoiding eye contact with me," Hannibal noted, sounding more than a little pleased.

Will took another breath and swallowed.

"I was curious about you," he confessed, feeling like he was either shaking to pieces or frozen to the spot, "and I didn't understand what I was seeing."

Hannibal kissed him again, and this time Will had the presence of mind to not completely dissociate through the experience.

"Do you understand now?" Hannibal asked.

Will huffed a laugh, taking the lapels of Hannibal's suit between his fingers.

"I actually think your attempt to help me focus worked."

Reputations

“So, word on the street is you’re the bloodhound.”

Will looked up from the files he had been reading and saw Agent Beverly Katz in the doorway of his office.

“Oh, uh, yeah. I’m not keen on having a street rep, but here I am,” he replied dryly.

Beverly nodded, walking in further and looking around the small space that had been almost filled with stacks of files and pictures tacked to the cork board. Will forced himself not to fidget, wanting to make a good impression on the FBI Agents.

“Well a street rep that can impress the guru has to be worth something,” she said, shrugging.

Will furrowed his brow.

“The guru?”

Beverly grinned.

“Jack Crawford. That’s what all the kids in the academy are calling him. He’s basically their hero. You wouldn’t know it by meeting him, though.”

Will nodded.

Jack Crawford cut an imposing figure, and impressive if you were young and an aspiring agent. He could see why they would idolize him.

“Does his status as someone with a rep make him more, or less inclined to be impressed by them?” Will asked, sliding papers back into the files.

Beverly propped her hip up on his desk and folded her arms, smiling.

“I’d say he still has a pretty objective view when they come into play. He knows a rep might have been earned through actual skill, but he also recognizes that they can also be a fluke. I wouldn’t worry about it if I were you. Jack wouldn’t have asked you on if he didn’t think you know what you’re doing,” She assured him.

Will sighed, sitting back in his seat and rubbing his face. He was getting tired of staring at all these crime scene photos.

“I honestly have no idea what I’m doing here,” He replied, “I can’t imagine I’m any better than the profilers the FBI already has.”

Beverly shrugged.

“I think our profilers are great at what they do, but Jack is looking for quicker results. He thinks you can get places faster than they can.”

Will nodded, though he really wasn’t convinced he would be able to help them very much.

“Well, I hope I can, or Jack doesn’t seem the type to be too happy with failure,” he said.

Beverly huffed a quiet laugh.

“You’re smart. I think you’ll do okay on some of the cases. I don’t know what to expect with this Ripper guy, but he’ll keep you around if you can help at all.”

Will shrugged.

He didn’t really count on Jack keeping him around. He was finding it incredibly addicting to have access to all the Ripper files, and being able to see all of his tableaus. There was something there that he desperately wanted, and needed, and that was the only real incentive for him to stay on with the FBI.

“Did you come here just to give the new guy a pep talk?” Will asked, trying not to sound too abrasive.

He had been trying more recently to not make everyone hate him, but he generally had a hard time keeping his sharp tongue under control.

Beverly smirked.

“Jack wants you down at the labs. He’s got something for you.”

Will sighed and stood up. Beverly waited to walk with him, even though it was only next door. When they walked in, Will was met with the sight of the two men walking about in less of a hurry than might have been called for. Zeller and Price didn’t seem as energetic as he would have expected, especially considering the body that lay on the table.

It wasn’t a Ripper kill, which was disappointing, but Will could see why Jack had asked him in. It was clearly not a first time kill for whoever had done it, though.

The man had all the flesh stripped from his left arm, and the lower part of his face. The man’s lower jaw gaped open, and his throat had been opened, exposing the trachea and arteries. The bones had been completely exposed and somehow treated so they looked stereo-typically sun bleached.

Will looked over the body, the rest of the team silent as he did. They were waiting for him to impress them, or make a fool of himself.

“Cause of death?” Will asked.

Price stepped forward and handed him a picture of the back of the man. There were a few punctures that looked similar to stabs from a knife, but there was something odd about them. The shape was off, or the angle. Will needed to think.

Will straightened and closed his eyes. He kept perfectly still, knowing the only thing that betrayed the fact that he was alive were the slow breaths that raised his shoulders and the flicking of his eyes beneath his eyelids.

The man was running away from Will, panicked breaths betraying his position as Will tracked him in silence. He came into view and Will extended his hand. Sparks flew from his fingers and the man fell with a cry. There was blood falling and oozing onto the leaves on the forest floor. It spread out as the man gurgled and sputtered.

Will stood over the man, more sparks at the ready in his palm.

This is my design.

Will opened his eyes and looked at the team. They had gathered around, watching him like he might grow antlers.

Will wet his lips and took a deep breath.

“Throwing knives,” Will stated, handing the picture back to Price.

They all stared at him, and he half wondered if antlers had indeed sprouted from his head while his eyes were closed.

“We’re looking for someone who either hunts or butchers,” Will continued, trying to ignore them as much as he could, “maybe someone who works with taxidermy, judging by the way the bones were exposed, undamaged, and displayed. This is someone who works with knives, and is really good at it. Throwing knives could be a big clue, because they probably take pride in their skill and either talk about it or show off. They might do other types of hunting as well.”

Will looked around at them, taking in each of their reactions.

Zeller seemed skeptical, and Price seemed impressed. Beverly was the only one who was smiling, and she nodded encouragingly at him. They all stood in surprised silence for a moment.

“What are you waiting for?” Jack demanded, “get to work. Zeller, make sure he’s right about the knives. Price, start looking for someone who matches that profile. Katz, anything on the fibers yet?”

“Working on it,” Beverly said, turning to return to her station while the others scrambled to follow Jack’s orders.

Will turned to Jack and rolled his shoulders.

“I didn’t want to say this,” Will said, keeping his eyes down at the the table behind Jack, “but it might be better if I can be at the scenes in the future. I would be able to get a better read of the person, and it would be faster.”

Jack nodded.

“Well, if you’re right about this one, then we’ll have you at the next scene before the body cools,” he answered, “that was pretty good. Take the file and write up anything else you can get.”

Will took the offered file with a nod.

It wasn’t as if he wanted to be dragged to the scene of a murder, but he knew it would be faster and better if he could see everything as it was left by the killer. It would be more like pulling on a glove, and less like sewing a glove out of untreated mouse skins, which is basically what he had to do when all he had were pictures.

Needless to say, he had quite a few mouse fur gloves sitting around his head after staring at the Ripper files for days.

Will took the file back to his office, not feeling entirely welcome in the labs. The others had never actually kicked him out while they worked, but they made it clear they weren’t really interested in talking to him, or having him there.

The exception, of course, was Beverly. She didn’t care much either way, but she was happy to answer any questions he might have.

Reading through the file, Will began the arduous task of assembling the pieces of mouse skin that was the information there.

This might not have been his first kill, but this was definitely personal. The killer knew where the victim was going to be, and when. They waited and attacked at the optimal time. They stripped the flesh from their jaw and their left hand, making a point.

Will made a note that the victim was probably left handed.

An attack like this was so intimately intentional, it was personal in a way it had never been with the Ripper. The Ripper didn’t care about his victims, seeing them merely as pests or annoyances to be taken care of. This killer had cared to the point of rage and revenge for a perceived betrayal.

Will sighed, knowing having the Ripper in his head so deep could prove detrimental to his profiling of other killers, but he couldn’t find it in himself to evict him from his place.

There was a place for the Ripper, in Will’s head, and it seemed like he had always belonged there. It felt like the room had been left vacant until the Ripper gathered his things and occupied it. It would be rude and nearly unthinkable to consider making him leave.

The other killers were more like campers, or squatters, taking up temporary residence in Will’s head whenever they came by, and leaving once their time was done. They made no real impact on the landscape, other than litter or carvings left into the trees in order to be remembered once they were gone.

Who had this man been to this killer?

Will had to drag his attention back to the case file in front of him, and he focused on the images waiting there.

What would the killer have done with the flesh he had stripped from the man's arm? The flesh from the face had almost certainly been discarded, having only been taken in order to humiliate the victim, showing off their lower jaw, probably in reciprocation for something they had done in life. Something they had said, maybe, considering the fact that their tongue was also missing.

Will recognized the hour with a regretful sigh. He hated bringing his work home, but it was a curse that came with his particular set of skills. The price of imagination was fear, and it haunted him his every waking hour.

Will packed up his things, sliding the case folder into his bag along with a few files from the Ripper. He might not have time to think about the Ripper on the clock, but that wouldn't stop him from staring at all the images he had been provided. The addiction was real, and Will could only hope it would result in the capture of the killer.

Walking up to his apartment door, Will smiled at the sound of excited barking he was met with, but internally sighed at the hurried footsteps that ambushed him from behind.

"Will!" Franklyn called as he rushed toward him, "you've been gone a lot more recently. On a big case?"

Will turned to him with a pained smile. He seriously considered moving in order to avoid his stalkerish neighbor, but it had been hard enough to find a place that was affordable and animal friendly.

"You could say that," Will replied, "the whole precinct has been pretty busy recently. Lots to do, and not enough hands."

Will plunged his hand into his pocket, gripping his apartment key in case he found an opening to escape.

"I read the Ripper is up and going again," Franklyn said, apparently not planning to let the conversation end any time soon, "I told Doctor Lecter that they probably put you on the case. You're the best of the best, so I told him you are definitely going to catch that guy, and then you'll be even more of a hero. Everyone knows you're going to be the best out there."

Will felt the smile fall farther away from his eyes, and he wondered if he would end up actually dying of boredom, a foot away from his door. The dogs would be confused and upset.

"Wait," Will said, "Doctor Lecter?"

At Franklyn's bright smile, Will immediately regretted it.

"Yes. Doctor Hannibal Lecter is my psychiatrist. Do you know him?"

At the mere concept, Franklyn seemed to be reaching new levels of excited. Will searched for an escape route.

“Uh, only in passing. I think he’s consulted on a case or two,” Will lied, “but I recognized the name. Now, I really have to be getting in to my dogs.”

Inching back to the door, Will gave every signal he knew how to give that he was done with the conversation.

“Well, if you ever have the chance, Doctor Lecter is a fantastic man. I really think you would get along well with him. You are both made of greatness, and I think you would like him.”

Will nodded at Franklyn’s words, trying not to think about the feeling of Hannibal’s hands on his skin, and his lips. The way his eyes seemed to change from liquid gold to blood in candlelight.

“Thank you. Goodbye, Franklyn,” Will said, quickly slipping into his apartment with a sigh.

Inside, Rosco and Bud crowded Will and licked at his face when he slid down the door tiredly. He grinned and petted them happily.

“Well guys,” Will said, “apparently Franklyn knows Doctor Lecter, and talks about me to him. I really hope that’s not going to end up complicating anything. He has a way of getting into a mix where he doesn’t belong.”

Rosco tipped his head as if he understood, and Bud nudged his way under Will’s hand once more. Will shook his head, amused, and lifted himself to gather the leashes.

To Work

“Apparently we have a mutual acquaintance,” Will said, leaning against the front of Hannibal's desk.

Hannibal looked up from where he had been drawing Will, with a look of consideration. Will had initially been put off when he found out Hannibal liked to draw him, but he had gotten over it.

“Are you speaking of Franklyn?”

Will smiled at the standoffish tone.

“Yeah. I didn't realize the world was so small. He said he talks about me, which I could have guessed.”

Hannibal nodded.

“As this pertains to you, I feel it is not too much of a breach to my doctor patient confidentiality if I discuss it with you,” Hannibal replied, “Franklyn has a fixation on those whom he considers great, or particularly good. You have fallen into that category for him.”

Will nodded as Hannibal stood to join him.

“So do you,” he said, “Franklyn said we are both made of greatness. Is it alright for a patient to have that kind of fixation on his psychiatrist?”

Hannibal raised an eyebrow at Will.

“It happens, on occasion,” he answered, “though I hardly think you are in a place to judge him on that ground.”

Will chuckled at the tease, shifting so they were pressing into each other's side.

“It just so happens that your obsession with me started before mine with you,” Will shot back with a grin, “so all unethical action is dirt on your cheek. Besides, I thought you stopped being my psychiatrist when you started being my friend.”

Hannibal hummed, turning so he was facing Will, his posture casual, but his chest pressed to Will's shoulder. He tipped his head forward and the tip of his nose tickled the shell of Wills ear.

“That is true enough,” he said softly, “though I hope the nature of our relationship does not interfere with your work at all.”

Will turned his head and captured Hannibal's lips in a kiss.

Hannibal was also there, in Will's head. He had slowly come to the realization, and it surprised him, though it didn't bother him as much as it should have. It felt like Hannibal was merely a tourist in his mind, rather than an intruder. He was there to observe and admire what he found rather than change or shape anything.

It was refreshing.

“Not a bit,” Will replied, his hands curling into the fabric of Hannibal's suit. He relished the thought of wrinkling the fabric, and changing the image he presented to the world, even slightly. “What does Franklyn say about me?”

Hannibal closed his eyes with the slightest smirk, lifting his chin so his nose brushed along Will's hairline.

“The Bloodhound,” he mused, “the best detective we have. You catch whoever you are set on the trail of, without fail. You are uniquely intelligent, and work hard, earning your name and place. A feeling follows you into a room, telling everyone within that you are important, yet incredibly humble. You don't tell people who you are if you can avoid it, but everyone should know of your brilliance.”

Will smiled to himself and tipped his head so he could kiss along Hannibal's jaw.

“Are those Franklyn's words, or yours?” He teased.

Hannibal hummed unhappily, the sound rumbling in his chest and up under Will's lips.

“His. I would choose my words differently,” he defended.

Will raised an eyebrow, pulling back to fix Hannibal with a look.

“What words would you choose?” He asked.

Hannibal pulled Will toward the door of the study, his movements as graceful as a dance.

“A mongoose, hiding under the house as a snake slithers by,” he answered, his voice soft and close as he led Will to the stairs.

“Blessed with the ability to understand even the darkest thoughts. Capable of much more than you are recognized for, and perhaps more than you know. Will Graham, the coveted resource of your field, and recluse by your own design.”

They were in the bedroom, then, and Hannibal crowded him up against the bed. Will kissed him as much as he could between the words he spoke, but Hannibal seemed determined to say everything he wished.

“I recognize your brilliance, but I differ from Franklyn much in the sense that I wish to hoard it and keep it for myself. I resent anyone who sees it without appreciating it as it should be.”

His analysis done, Hannibal allowed them both to fall onto the mattress.

Will was determined to kiss all of those words out of his pretentious mouth. The man seemed to have no shame, but Will craved that feeling. It was addicting to be around Hannibal.

“Matthew. How are we doing on that case report?” Will asked, looking over a few papers that he needed to check before they left his desk.

“Almost done, sir,” came the still overly formal reply, “and if I may ask, why have you been absent so much recently?”

Will lifted his eyes to look at his young partner. The boy seemed genuinely concerned that Will had been ill, or having trouble. As much as Will wanted to tell him it was none of his business, he couldn't bring himself to resent the boy for caring.

“It's all under wraps,” Will replied, “but I'm helping out the FBI for a bit.”

Matthews eyes grew wide, and his lopsided grin split across his face once more.

“You're even better than what they have,” Matthew concluded, “and now they are going to see how good you are. I'm just sorry they are probably going to take you from us.”

Will grunted.

“I'm not going anywhere,” he replied, “I'm not FBI, and I don't plan on switching to it. I can do plenty from here, and that's what I want.”

Honestly, he hadn't had a much better reception into the FBI than he had into the police force. A few saw him as harmless, while the others disliked him and begrudgingly acknowledged his usefulness.

It had been his curse all his life to have the same niche in a work dynamic. His superiors loved his work, but hated his personality. His peers either hated him or ignored him, while most subordinates admired him. He hated every part.

“They have you on the Ripper case.”

It wasn't a question, or a statement. It was a guess that sounded more excited than Will really thought it warranted.

“I'm not allowed to tell you anything about what I'm helping them with,” Will replied flatly.

Will's intuition had never been wrong, but it was telling him there was something off with his partner. His skin itched wherever the boy’s gaze landed, and it was like he was trying to peel away at him.

“Well, you are going to be the one to catch him. You are better than anyone.”

That was the end of the rope for Will, who set his jaw and had to pick his next words carefully.

“Matthew. I get that you really respect me, and you have a lot of faith in me. I don't want you to think you've done anything wrong, but I want you to stop talking about me like I'm a saint. If saints exist, I'm not one of them, and I can't stand hearing that all the time. You're a good kid, but I can't. If you want to keep being my partner, then stop.”

Matthew didn't seem upset, or even really surprised. He just nodded, as if this was one more sign of Will's benevolence.

“Yes sir,” he said.

Will actually had nothing wrong with him calling him sir, so he nodded in return and set his attention back to the paperwork.

Besides, the kid hadn't even seen him actually doing what he was good at.

Matthew would be pleased.

Maybe that was an odd thought to have, standing in the middle of a murder scene, but Will was anything but ordinary.

It was a classic case of a disorganized, rage killing. There was an abundance of evidence left by the killer, and the two forensic officers moved around carefully tagging, bagging, and photographing everything.

Matthew, who stood just behind Will, would be pleased because he would finally see how Will worked.

“Shoe print,” Will said to his partner, pointing, “size eleven. That puts the killer at five ten to six two, unless they are disproportionate. That's the pattern for the sole of an athletic shoe, and their walking pattern doesn't show any trouble, so they are probably an athlete. Running, jogging, or maybe soccer. Not tennis or football. Maybe basketball.”

Will turned on his heel, fixing his gaze on another evidence marker.

“Bloody hand print by the window shades. They were probably interrupted, or they worried about being seen all of a sudden after the attack. They left the knife, so they probably considered it to be an interruption. Someone might have come to the door. No signs of forced entry, but a hurried exit through the back door. This guy knew the victim, and became angry. He had not planned to kill this man, but after he did, he determined to get away from the scene without being caught. The knife doesn't belong to the victim, so the killer brought it with him. It's not a kitchen knife, and he hadn't planned to kill him, so the killer probably carries a knife with him regularly.”

Will stopped, spinning around and fixing his partner with a look.

“What else?”

Matthew jumped at the question, meeting Will's eyes and blinking in surprise. He quickly looked around the room, trying to catch something Will hadn't mentioned.

“The victim is prone, and the wounds in his back, so he was attacked from behind,” he answered at length.

“Which tells you what?” Will prodded.

Matthew bit his lip, not knowing how to answer.

Will nodded with a quiet sigh.

“There was no reason for the victim to fear his attacker. He turned his back, which means they were not arguing when it happened. The killer became angry on his own volition, which means he probably has aggressive mood swings and a volatile personality. What should we be looking for?”

Again, Will hit the ball into Matthews court and waited to see how he would respond.

“A man of average height, probable previous incidents with authority. Violent tendencies, and he would have gotten covered in blood. At least a bit athletic, knew the victim, and carried a knife with him.”

Matthew recited it all like lines of a school play, and Will repressed the image of himself patting Matthew in the head for doing a good job. He had a good memory, but little imagination. He could see all the dots, but couldn't connect them.

Will nodded, but tapped his fingers a bit on the back of his other hand. He cast one more glance around the room before waving for Matthew to follow him out.

Being Right

“How are you finding working two jobs?” Hannibal asked.

Will shrugged.

“It’s not really like working two jobs,” he said, “I’m doing the same thing in two buildings. I just have to not talk about one of them.”

Hannibal nodded.

Will figured Hannibal had expected him to say something like that. The other man always had a way of knowing how Will felt about things without Will having to say anything. It sometimes bothered Will that Hannibal seemed to be putting on a show of asking, making it seem like he didn’t already know. Hannibal seemed to always be hiding something, and Will wanted to pick away at his walls until he discovered what it was.

“Your ability to balance your work is remarkable, especially for someone who has so much on their mind without having more pressed on it,” Hannibal said, and Will could hear the genuine admiration in his voice.

Despite knowing how Hannibal felt, it always made Will smile when it was reinforced through his words and actions.

“And your ability to pretend you don’t already know things is just as remarkable,” Will shot back, “You just like to hear me talk. You want to make sure I don’t lie to you.”

As Will spoke, he moved closer to Hannibal’s desk, and Hannibal looked up to meet his movements. His eyes shone with adoration and hunger, and Will smirked.

“There are more reasons behind what I do and say,” Hannibal replied, though he was smiling to himself as well.

Will nodded, leaning against the desk casually.

“You like to test me,” he said, “and make me show off what I know.”

Hannibal stood and leaned over the desk to kiss Will. Will smiled into it, knowing he had caught Hannibal in his little game.

One of the things he really, really liked about Hannibal, was that he was never behind, and he was never ahead. They both met each other where they stood, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. They spoke like a dance, circling and weaving around each other, one in purpose and in mind.

Will had never met anyone who matched him so well. He didn’t think he ever would again.

“Would you agree to let me show you off *myself*?” Hannibal asked, brushing Will’s chin with his thumbs as he cradled his jaw.

Will scoffed.

“Are you inviting me out?” he asked in reply.

Hannibal smiled, and his eyes twinkled in a way Will had only ever seen a few times, when he looked at him.

“There is an opera in town. I would greatly appreciate having the opportunity to take you.”

Will laughed, placing his hands on Hannibal’s forearms, though he made no attempt to move his hands away from his face.

“You want me to be your arm candy for the night?” he teased, “your pretty little cop that you managed to rope into a night out?”

Hannibal hummed, pulling him into another kiss.

“I am not sure I would agree with the term “Arm Candy”,” he said, “though I doubt anyone would attempt to claim that you are not beautiful.”

Will felt his face heat up as he blushed.

He should have known better, but he hadn’t expected Hannibal to say that. He was not oblivious to the fact that he was good looking, but he had done everything in his power to avoid having *that* be what people saw when they looked at him. He didn’t like to have people stare at him like he was nothing more than his face.

“An opera,” he said, trying to sound more calm than he was, “I don’t think I’ve ever been to an opera. I’m not typically good company when it comes to the higher social class.”

Hannibal lowered his hand to Will’s hips and lifted him onto the desk to pull him across the surface and closer to him. Will wanted to laugh at the man, trying to impress him with his strength while showing his impatience and unwillingness to just walk around the desk. Despite knowing what Hannibal was doing, it was working.

“I’d be glad to introduce you to both the art and my acquaintances,” Hannibal said into his neck, “if you would agree to come with me.”

Will silently cursed the man. He was too damn good at getting what he wanted.

“Would you dump me if I piss them off?” Will asked, half serious.

Hannibal laughed, and it tickled against Will’s skin.

“I do not think you could get rid of me so easily,” he said, sounding just as serious as Will’s question had been, “though I may become more infatuated with you if you did.”

Will chuckled in return. Somehow, that had actually made him feel better.

“Then I will have to try to behave myself,” he said.

“Please do not.”

“Carson Sheen,” Zeller declared, “avid hunter, won several knife throwing competitions in the past years, amateur taxidermist, used to be best friends with our victim.”

Will nodded.

“Sounds like our guy. Any history of violent tendencies or rumors of a falling out with the victim?”

Price piped up then, picking up where Zeller left off like they were the same person.

“As a matter of fact, there's been a rumor lately that they got into a disagreement over money. It's always money, right? Well, this guy started a business, Carson invested in it, and the endeavor went under. I guess this guy didn't pay back the investment, and his best friend didn't like that much.”

Will nodded. There had been plenty of murders over money, even among family and friends. This seemed like it stemmed from something more personal, but money may have been the catalyst that set off the end game.

“Any rumors of previous slights?” he asked, shuffling through some papers as an excuse to avoid eye contact, “anything that could explain some build up of hard feelings?”

Price shrugged.

“I’m not a housewife,” he said, tone almost whining, “I don’t know everything people are saying.”

Zeller huffed, seeming to agree a bit loudly, earning a look from Price. Beverly walked in and smirked like she had heard a joke no one else had.

“In my experience, guys are more aware of gossip than girls. I never knew what people were saying, but all my guy friends could tell me exactly what was said by anyone, and how far the rumors had reached.”

Zeller rolled his eyes.

“Just because you were a nerd, and didn’t listen to the gossip, doesn’t mean *no* females do,” he objected.

Beverly raised an eyebrow at him.

“You’re one to talk.”

Zeller pouted, but Beverly turned her attention to Will instead of humoring him.

“There was also a fiber found on the guy’s head. It matches a material usually used for taxidermy. Looks like so far you're doing a damn good job here. How do you feel?”

Will shrugged.

“I feel like he's still out there,” he replied, “and this isn't the case Jack wanted me to work on when he found me.”

He rubbed a hand over his face with a heavy sigh. He wanted to be working on the ripper case, but he couldn't until this case was wrapped up.

Beverly gave him a sympathetic smile.

“You're doing good. It probably helps to do something different for a while, even if it's still murder, you know? We don't know when we're going to get another relatively normal one like this.”

Will knew she was right.

This killer *wished* they were like the ripper. The way they humiliated their victim, trying to display them like art. They probably thought it would get lumped in with his. But they weren't anything like him. This wasn't art.

Will knew he should feel different about the ripper. He should be horrified. He should *at least* be horrified by his own reactions to the killings. He shouldn't wait with baited breath to see what would come next, and be disappointed every day that passed without a new scene.

It hadn't always been like this. He had gone through his days just doing his job, and doing it well. He had followed the ripper case out of nothing more than morbid curiosity, or so he had told himself. He had worked day in and day out to keep people safe.

When had he started wanting to see death?

“Well, call me in when the guy is here,” Will said, “I'm going home.”

Beverly nodded, and even Jack didn't object to him leaving when they passed each other in the hall. Will knew that Jack liked him, but he also knew not to expect special treatment. He didn't think there were many people who could get that from the man.

Chases

“Detective Graham,” the woman said, ducking her head shyly. Her tight red curls bounced at even the slightest movement, and Will could only think she reminded him of a fox. “I'm a huge fan. I've followed your career for years. You're the bloodhound.”

“No.”

Will's reaction seemed to surprise her, and her facade dropped for a heartbeat.

“What?”

Will sighed, continuing to walk along the sidewalk. He was definitely not going to let her follow him to get his tuxedo. He didn't need her on his case like that.

“You're Freddie Lounds. You write that mockery of a news site called TattleCrime.com. You were about to give me some story about being a fan, and then you were going to ask me a bunch of questions in order to write an article on me. I'm saving you the trouble, and refusing to comment on whatever you were going to ask me.”

Freddie dropped the act, but not the conversation.

“So, is that why you're so successful as a detective? You can tell when people are lying? How does that help you when you don't have a suspect? Is it true you are working with the FBI on the Ripper case?”

Will felt his steps catch at the mention of the ripper, but he hoped she wouldn't notice.

“I'm not talking to you, Freddie. I don't know who you've been talking to, but I don't want you bothering me.”

Freddie huffed, but stopped following him. It seemed his tendency to walk quickly was paying off, because she hadn't had an easy time of keeping up.

At least now he knew what she looked like, so he could warn Matthew about who to avoid.

Freddie Lounds had all but given him the name bloodhound, and he wasn't really going to thank her for it. She had written about him in his earlier years as an officer, and had cast doubt on the legitimacy of his skills. She had fabricated ideas that he had to have inside informants in order to catch criminals as such a young officer.

Luckily, or unluckily, what the public had taken from her article was that he could catch people no one else could, and he caught whoever he set out to.

Like an animal stalking another animal, Will graham can catch criminals. He finds their scent, like a bloodhound, and fixates so fully that he will find them no matter where they go.

One might wonder if it truly takes one to know one, and if officer Graham might have more going for him than just beginners luck.

Will hadn't cared at all when the article came out. As far as he was concerned, no one worth his time read her writing. A week later, he heard someone call him the bloodhound, and that was when it all began.

Thinking of her as a fox now, Will smiled to himself. A bloodhound being chased by a fox. How comical.

Will wandered around for a bit to make sure she wasn't following him before he picked up his tux. He had never been to an opera before, but Hannibal had informed him of the dress code. He had the sneaking suspicion that Hannibal really, really wanted to see him dress up.

It made him smile to think about. Someday, he would have to find an excuse to make Hannibal dress down. Seeing the man in a t-shirt would be something to remember.

“How have you been recently, Doctor Lecter?” Will asked, relaxing back into the couch.

They had gotten into a rhythm with each other, where Will would visit Hannibal at his home or they would go out. They rarely went anywhere fancy, despite Hannibal's attempts. Will had convinced him that small cafes and bakeries were better, because he wanted to keep a fairly low profile.

Hannibal had offered to visit Will's apartment, but Will had thus far declined. He wasn't sure exactly why, but he didn't want Hannibal to be where he experienced so much of his own darkness. He wanted Hannibal to remain untainted.

“I have been doing very well. I hope you have not been overwhelmed by your work.”

Will shrugged lightly.

“If anything, I'm getting anxious,” he admitted, “I guess I expected to be doing more on the Ripper case. I feel underutilized.”

Hannibal's laughter caught him off guard, and Will snapped his head up to look at him.

“Forgive me, Will,” Hannibal said, walking over and kneeling on the floor next to him, “but there are times I am overcome by your radiance.”

Will felt his face grow warm with embarrassment and frustration.

“What the hell is so funny?”

Hannibal clasped his hand, bringing it to his smiling lips and kissing it. It was something Will was sure he would never get used to.

“Never have I met anyone who could balance two occupations that require such high mental capacity, and find themselves bored. It only shows your brilliance.”

Will snorted, pulling his hand free and using it to pull Hannibal up into a kiss.

“I don't know how you can stand saying such sugary things, when all I ever do is say how pretentious and ridiculous you are.”

Hannibal was still smiling, and Will loved how good smiles looked on him. It was something he didn't overdo, and was almost exclusively genuine when directed at Will.

“We are both unique in that we speak our minds,” Hannibal offered, “your thoughts about me are that I am almost fantastically high class, and mine about you are that you are exclusively talented to be beautiful in your work.”

Will shook his head.

“Are my actions not contradictory to my thoughts, then?” He asked.

Hannibal shook his head.

“They show that you are able to overcome your worry over social class in order to recognize compatibility where it may be. Your logic can overcome your bias.”

Will chuckled.

“And you keep reminding me why I call you pretentious. Do you ever talk like a normal person?”

“Do you ever think like one?”

“Fair enough, I guess.”

Hannibal kissed Will on the forehead and slid in behind him on the couch. They shared a comfort between them that Will had never had with anyone. It was nice, and a bit terrifying.

“Do you enjoy working on the ripper case?” Hannibal asked casually. His voice rumbled against Will's back, and Will felt completely protected.

“Yes… And no,” Will answered, chewing his lip. He knew Hannibal would wait for him to get his thoughts together. “I feel a bit bad, because I like reading the files and seeing the pictures more than I like telling Jack what I see.”

Hannibal hummed softly, setting his chin on Will's shoulder.

“With your aversion to being social, I hardly understand why you should feel bad for that.”

Will sighed, dropping his head back so it lay on Hannibal's shoulder. He stared up at the ceiling, dreading what he was about to say.

“It's not the social aspect, though,” he confessed, “it's like I want to keep him a secret. I want him to be mine. I don't want anyone else to know what I can see and feel when I look at what he does. I'm addicted to his crime scenes, but it's a finite resource. I don't know.”

Will knew it really didn't sound like he didn't know, but it was something he found himself saying when he needed to divert attention away from what he was saying.

“Your words remind me of what I once told you about how I see you,” Hannibal noted.

Will remembered, and he felt his face grow warm again.

“Hell, Hannibal. I don't mean it like that.”

“Yes you do.”

The words were not accusing, but certain. It was like Hannibal could hear the unspoken words. The words he denied, but were true.

Will turned himself over so he could face Hannibal. Even his eyes betrayed no judgement. He only showed quiet admiration, and intense focus.

“Doesn't that bother you?” Will asked, not entirely sure he wanted to hear the answer.

Hannibal slid his hands under Will's shirt, smiling softly.

“Not in the least,” he said.

Being Clever

“You ready for the interrogation, sir?”

Will sighed, but nodded to his young companion.

“As I'll ever be,” he said.

Matthew seemed as excited to see this as he was to see Will do anything. It was like he thought Will was some infinite source of perfection and intelligence.

Will would know within the first minute if they had the right guy. Where his trick came into play was getting him to confess or show that he was guilty.

Walking into the room, Will looked the man up and down.

He was thin. His body was built like a track star, and he had short cropped hair. He sat casually, like he had not a care in the world. Only narcissists and murderers sat that way in this room. Some people were both.

“Good morning. You Brandon Hart?”

The man looked up, and apparently decided Will was no one to worry about.

“I'm here because Dan got stabbed, right?”

Will smiled, making it an obviously fake attempt to be friendly.

“Smart man. I hear you knew him, and we just need to ask a few questions.”

Brandon smirked, as if he had already gotten away with everything.

“Fire away,” he said, tucking his hands into his pockets as he leaned back in the chair.

Will sat down with his file and nodded.

“I'd like to get to know you a bit. Makes conversation flow better, you know?” He said, this time hiding the insincerity.

Brandon shrugged.

“Good. I mean, it's a bit scary to think that people can just get stabbed, right? I'm glad I can carry. Makes me feel safer,” Will said.

Brandon nodded, actual interest sparkling in his eye.

“Yeah. I don't have a gun, but I will someday. I make do, though. I carry a knife on my belt every day. Protection, you know.”

Will nodded. The hook was baited, and the target was showing clear interest.

“I know. You're smart, I can tell that. You could probably avoid getting stabbed. You'd have to make someone angry, real angry, for them to want to stab you. Did Dan tend to make people angry?”

Brandon huffed an amused breath.

“Not all the time, but just often enough. He didn't usually know he messed up, though, so people would just hold a grudge. Even *I've* been upset with him,” Brandon said.

Will nodded.

“Makes sense. Some people are just like that. You run a lot? I notice you wear running shoes.”

Brandon grinned, lifting up his feet to admire the shoes himself.

“Yeah. I run every morning, and I play basketball on the weekends. Gotta be able to outrun those killers, right?”

He didn't seem to notice that this was not the time or place for a joke like that, but Will paid it no mind.

“Or from us cops,” he replied, matching the joking tone.

Brandon gawked, and Will opened the file.

“What?”

Will didn't answer, reading through this guy's priors.

“You've been in before. Domestic abuse. Got a bit of a temper, Brandon?”

Brandon didn't answer, his mouth agape.

“You were diagnosed with bipolar disorder as a teenager, but stopped filling your prescription a few years ago, without consulting your doctor. That's never a good idea. There's a note saying that you were specifically a violent manic type, which seems to match what your prior charges say. You're about six feet tall, athletic, carry a knife with you, and you knew the victim. All that fits the profile we've got of the killer.”

Will said it all with a flat, matter of fact tone that belied no biases or prejudices.

Brandon was angry.

“What crackhead wrote that profile?” He demanded, now sitting at attention and nearly pounding the table with his fists.

Will nodded.

“I did,” he said conversationally, “and I have to say, you really *do* fit the profile well. I'm not always this accurate, but I'm sure the fingerprints will prove that I'm right. Thank you, Mr. Hart.”

Brandon stood to object, but Will already had the file under his arm and was out the door.

Matthew whooped and rushed up to him in the hall. He was grinning, and Will feared he might try to hug him.

“That was amazing, sir. We've got him for sure. Should I send someone in to get a written confession?”

Will waved him off.

“Give him seven minutes, exactly. Long enough to get scared, and not long enough to come down off it. Send someone who won't try to talk to him, and who's intimidating.”

Matthew nodded, and directed his attention to his watch as he walked off to find someone matching the requirements.

Will was dead tired. He hated interrogations, but he was good at them. They always left him drained. He headed to the Chief's office.

“Chief. I need off early today. I as good as got the guy, and I'm going to be useless for the rest of the day. You know how it is.”

Chief Sutcliff looked up and nodded. He knew what Will was like, and he knew he was right.

“Take some time off. You're a workaholic, Will. I like that most days, but don't let yourself fall apart for it.”

Will smiled and nodded.

“Thank you, sir.”

Will had no intention of taking a break longer than a three day weekend, but he appreciated that the chief cared.

Will managed to avoid Franklyn that day, and spent some time with Rosco and Bud. Nothing was better for him than spending time with his dogs.

Will put on the tux and looked in the mirror at himself.

This was why he wasn’t social. Well, it was one of many reasons.

He looked ridiculous. He wasn’t made for clothes like this. He was supposed to wear t-shirts and jeans when he wasn’t wearing his uniform. He was not supposed to dress up, feeling like a penguin in the tailored clothes.

With a sigh, Will set about on his hair. He didn't want to look like a homeless guy that someone had dunked in a fancy tank. He had had to trim the beard, but he refused to shave. He would look like a kid, and he hated when people treated him like he was that young.

It reminded him of Matthew, and Will grimaced as he ran his hand through the fresh product in his hair.

He tried not to treat people differently based on their age, and he tried to be aware of his own biases. Matthew was just *so* young. He felt like he had to wrap the kid in bubble wrap before he left the precinct. He didn't have experience sitting behind his eyes to age him, either. That was what Will had that helped him pass as older.

That, and a good layer of scruff.

Run In

“You look splendid,” Hannibal said, his voice smooth as ever, and his movements more so.

Will rolled his eyes, but gave him a quick kiss as he slid into the car.

“I look like hell, but thanks. You look nice too.”

Hannibal smiled and shut the door for Will.

Once they were on the way, Will prepared himself to see all the people. There would be people that wanted to talk to him, and he would have to pretend to be glad to be there. He was going to try his hardest to be likable, despite the teasing he had subjected Hannibal to.

The building was old, and well made, and Will liked having at least that to look at instead of the people around them. It was a sea of perfumes and fine cloth, most of which Will had no name for, and simply labeled it as fancy.

Hannibal steered him through the throng of people socializing before the actual event. His hand on the small of Will’s back acted as an anchor to reality when Will would have let himself sink into his own mind. The murmur of conversation buffeted against him like a slow tide.

Hannibal apparently was not very interested in conversation before the opera started, because they only had a few minutes of navigating the crowd before he led Will to their seats. Will was thankful for that, because he didn’t want to make a scene before they even got to enjoy themselves.

Despite his resolution not to make a fool of himself, Will didn’t trust others not to recognize him and do the job for him.

There was one thing that was almost as good for Will’s overcrowded mind as his dogs. That was music.

There had been a time in his life when others had thought him weird for paying so much attention to the music that had played around him. They had been of the mind that music was all basically background noise, and it needed only a part of their minds focus at any one time. Will had always listened intently, making note of the melodies and words that played through speakers, or headphones. He had always thought it must be a side effect of his likely autism.

Will was fixated by the figures on the stage, identifying them more by the sound of their voice than by their appearance. He couldn’t understand the words. They must have been Italian, he thought to himself.

The music led his mind through the story despite him not knowing what was being said.

At the intermission, Will was in a better mood than he had been at the beginning of the evening, and Hannibal took notice immediately. He leaned close to Will as they stood and pressed a kiss to his temple.

“You are enjoying yourself,” he said.

Will blushed, but pushed Hannibal back a bit.

“Yeah. Gloat all you want later. I can survive some socializing, but only if you take the lead here. I’m sure your friends are dying to talk to you.”

Hannibal smiled.

“Of course,” he said.

They managed to make it into the throng and each take a glass of champagne before Hannibal was finally tracked down by one of his friends.

“Hannibal. I haven’t seen you around nearly as much as I used to. Who is your handsome young friend?”

The woman was all sharp angles, not softened at all by the sparkles on her dress. Will wasn’t sure if she was trying to scare people, but he was definitely scared. She looked at him like she had the power to crush him under her thumb, but was choosing to watch him instead.

“Madame Komeda,” Hannibal said, his tone sounding warm to anyone but Will.

Will glanced up at him, and could see that some sort of mask had come over his face. His face showed friendly affection, but Will could see that he was less than enthralled with the company. He was merely amused at her presence. It was a little bit odd to see.

“This is Will Graham. He is a detective for the local police. I apologize for my recent absence. Psychiatry is an unforgiving field, and one I have committed myself to for the foreseeable future.”

The woman tipped her head at him slightly before turning to Will.

“A detective? That sounds exciting. I admit there is not much excitement around here, unless Hannibal is throwing one of his dinner parties. They are simply amazing.”

Will smiled politely, taking a leaf from Hannibal’s book in order to fake a look of honest interest.

“I’m sure my life could do with more of that kind of excitement,” Will said genially, earning a bright smile from Hannibal.

Ms Komeda smiled as well.

“Well, maybe you can convince him to do one again. It’s been far too long. I was almost starting to think he was just snubbing me, until I found out no one else had been invited to

one either."

Hannibal gave her an apologetic smile, but again, Will could tell he was not genuine in his presentation. It was off putting.

"One cannot force inspiration. A feast must make itself," He replied calmly.

"It's not a unicorn, Hannibal. Oh dear, I seem to have been hogging you all to myself. Someone else would like your attention."

Hannibal's face fell, ever so slightly. He must know who it was. Will turned to see, and he felt his own mask fall away in pieces.

Franklyn. Why was he here? Why wouldn't he be? It was exactly Will's luck for him to track him down here. The one place he wanted to be seen as normal.

"Hello, Franklyn," Hannibal said coolly.

His tone did not invite conversation, but Will knew it would not deter Franklyn either. Only words just short of outright rejection would get the message through to him.

"Hi, doctor Lecter. Will," Franklyn said.

He was absolutely beaming as he greeted them both, and Will was frozen in place. He couldn't even bring himself to pretend to be glad to see him. He just stared on with only barely concealed horror.

Hannibal took note, shifting closer so their shoulders brushed.

Will wished he had something stronger than champagne. He was too sober to deal with Franklyn right now.

"How do you know each other?" Ms Komeda asked, trying to keep the conversation going despite the tangible discomfort in the air.

Franklyn looked to Hannibal for a response, and Hannibal hesitated just long enough to show that he wasn't comfortable exposing the exact nature of their relationship.

"Franklyn is one of my neighbors," Will stepped in, taking pity on him.

Ms Komeda nodded with a light smile. Hannibal smiled as well, and it rang of relief more than anything to Will.

"Are you enjoying the performance?" Hannibal asked Franklyn, ever polite.

The temptation to laugh right then almost overtook Will's anxiety. Hannibal was reverting to universally safe conversation topics in the face of Franklyn. It was good to know Will wasn't the only one who felt uncomfortable seeing him there.

"I loved it. Every minute so far."

Will could taste the lie like cheap liquor on his tongue. Franklyn was only the type to come to this kind of thing because he wanted to be. He only faked enjoyment. He didn't understand the nuances, and Will could tell.

"You were more interested in Doctor Lecter," Will stated, not having the energy to be overly nice to Franklyn just then, "your eyes kept wandering from the stage, and I bet you hardly heard any of the arias."

Most of that was conjecture, but Will couldn't find it in himself to regret the words.

Franklyn looked entirely caught, turning a bit pink in the cheeks and smiling sheepishly.

"I, uh," he coughed, "I admit I was a bit distracted. I really didn't expect you to be the kind of person to enjoy opera, Will."

Franklyn was trying to divert the conversation to a topic he was more comfortable with. Unfortunately, that topic was Will.

"I have never been before," Will admitted, "but when I am invited by a friend, I can hardly say no."

Will felt a little bit bad for that one. Franklyn had invited him to things before, and he had always declined with varying degrees of politeness. By saying this, he was letting Franklyn know, very plainly, that he did not consider them friends.

"Well, I for one am glad you came," Ms Komeda said genuinely, "It was very nice to meet you, Will. I hope Hannibal brings you more often."

With that, she took her leave, and it was time to return to their seats. Hannibal turned to Franklyn with a tight smile.

"It was good to see you, Franklyn," he said, shaking his hand.

Franklyn nodded, and Will could see that the gears in his head were still turning. He was trying to figure out what everything that just happened meant.

Will didn't bother shaking his hand, choosing to keep his eyes down as he usually did instead.

"I am almost tempted to leave with you now," Hannibal whispered into Will's ear as they sat down.

Will berated him with a look.

"Well, I don't want people to think I'm rude," he said, "and like you said, I am enjoying the music."

A look of near horror passed over Hannibal's face as he seemed to realize something.

"You don't know Italian," he said, looking like he was mentally slapping himself.

The lights dimmed as Will laughed silently, shaking his head. He gave Hannibal a kiss as the curtains opened again and the music began again. Hannibal gripped his hand and whispered a promise to tell him all about it afterwards.

During the last aria, Hannibal's eyes shone with tears, and Will could feel the deep emotions the man beside him felt at the words being sung. He didn't care one bit that he didn't understand them. All he needed was Hannibal.

Run Out

“It seems you are needed quite urgently,” Hannibal said sleepily.

Will groaned, rolling over on the bed to bury his face in Hannibal’s back. It was too early to go to work. He just wanted to stay here, and have Hannibal tell him again about Rigoletto. The way his accent curled around the words, relating every detail like he had witnessed it all himself.

Hannibal had really been so pleased with Will after the opera. He claimed it was just because Will was radiant, as was his new favorite thing to call him. Will had his own ideas, and thought it had no little amount to do with how he had dealt with Franklyn.

“I don’t want to go,” he whined.

Hannibal chuckled, low and rumbling through his chest, and he turned over to press a kiss to the crown of Will’s head.

“I would love for you to stay, but I think the FBI must take priority. Agent Crawford has hardly waited seconds between messages to you this morning.”

Will furrowed his brow, looking up to Hannibal.

“It’s going to be the Ripper,” he said slowly. Then, he remembered Jack’s words. “It’s a fresh scene. I’m going to see it fresh.”

Maybe his excitement at the idea showed in his face, or his voice. Hannibal stared at him for a moment, and for the first time Will could remember, he put a mask on when it was just them. Will couldn’t read his emotions, and it scared him.

“Don’t do that,” he said before he could stop himself.

Hannibal froze, looking confused.

“Will?”

Will shook his head, thumping it lightly against Hannibal’s chest.

“Don’t hide from me like that. If it bothers you, that I care about the Ripper kills so much, just let me see it. I can’t stand to have you do that to me. If it bothers you, tell me.”

Hannibal pulled him up into a kiss, and it felt like an apology. He was sorry for something.

“It does not bother me,” he promised, pressing their foreheads together, “but I do worry that others will notice your feelings about it.”

Will laughed bitterly.

“No one else knows what my emotions look like,” he replied, “They just think I’m weird, and they wouldn’t know how much of anything is just me, or if something more weird is going on.”

Hannibal kissed him again, and Will held onto him hard. He wanted to have Hannibal always be honest with him, but Hannibal was probably the only person who could get away with lying to him. He wanted to keep him like this forever.

“I have to go,” he said after a minute, sitting up and sliding out of the bed.

Hannibal relinquished his grasp, sitting up as well and watching Will gather his things. They had ultimately decided to end up at Hannibal’s house, in order to avoid running into Franklyn again. That meant Will would have to hurry over to his apartment in order to get clothes that were not his tux.

Hannibal stood as well, dressing with precise motions that Will was growing to admire more and more every day. Hannibal was always put together, and Will always felt like he was falling apart. It was an odd dichotomy, for sure.

Hannibal drove Will to his apartment, kissing his hand before letting Will leave the car. He mumbled a few things under his breath that made Will blush and call him pretentious again before he shut the door and waved goodbye.

Jack called.

“I need you here a half hour ago,” Jack accused.

Will sighed.

“I’m sorry, Jack. I’ve got a bit of a hangover. I’ll be there as soon as I can. I’m just moving a bit slow today.”

Jack accepted that as an excuse, but reminded Will that the body would cool soon, and he needed to be there.

Will rolled his eyes. The body was cool before it was found if it was the Ripper. He didn’t need to worry about that.

He swallowed just a mouthful of whiskey before he hurried out the door to secure his alibi. He always looked like he could be hungover, but the smell would make sure he was believed if it came into question.

The building was familiar, but Will wasn’t sure why. Jack greeted him out front, and watched him carefully as he entered.

“Morning,” Will said gruffly, only offering a glance up to the man.

“I think this is one of his,” Jack stated, not having to clarify who he was talking about, “and I need you to confirm.”

Will nodded.

“For my best work, I’m going to need the scene to be as clear as possible,” Will told him.

Jack agreed and quickly told all of the agents to get off the scene. Once it was clear, Will took off his glasses and lifted his gaze to finally set his eyes on the body.

Will felt like he had just plunged into an ocean, almost falling over from the feeling.

It was the Ripper.

Will knew it from just one look. The flowers were enough to confirm it for him, but there was so much more.

The man was a police officer. He had just been transferred out of Will’s precinct, and Will still recognized him. His abdomen had been opened and emptied, his organs spilling out into the flower bed beneath him. His badge was nestled inside the cavity, and his feet were buried in the stems of the flowers growing there. Their bright pink and white petals brushed up against the pale skin. Something about them wasn’t fitting like it should, but he turned his attention back to the man.

Will stepped forward, his actions in reality echoing those in his mind. He lifted the chin of the man and his eyes caught on something around his neck.

A dog collar.

Will’s hands shook in reality as the confident hands in his mind fastened the collar around this man’s neck. He turned the little metal tag around and read what his other pair of hands brushed over proudly.

If found, return to Jack Crawford, FBI

Will stopped breathing. He froze in place while his other self moved about.

He planted the flowers, taking care that they grew well and looked perfect. He set up the cross for the man to be tied to, making sure everything was perfect. He picked out the red leather collar with care, getting the tag engraved, and finding this man.

This scene had a purpose. It was more than the others. It was special. He wanted someone to see it, and for them to understand what it meant.

Every scene was made with care, with delicate and sure hands. This one, though. This one had to be better. It had to be perfect. It had to be seen.

Will snapped back into his body, feeling like he emerged from an icy ocean and could finally breathe again.

He turned and walked out, finding Jack right away.

The look he gave Jack seemed to communicate his need for a private conversation. Jack sent all the agents back into the scene, and stepped away with Will, who was still shaking a bit.

“What did you see?” Jack asked.

“It’s him,” Will said, his voice shaking as much as his hands, “It’s the Ripper. You were right. It’s him.”

Jack stared at him expectantly, and Will had to take a deep breath and try to calm himself down.

“He knows I’m working with you,” he continued, “this is a message to me. He wanted me to know that he knows. I don’t know why he cares. I don’t know what he knows about me. I don’t know why he did this, but he is intent on having me know something.”

Jack pressed his lips together. He wasn’t happy, but Will didn’t know if it was directed at him, or at the situation, or the ripper, or all of them.

“Why do you think this is about you?” Jack said.

That was an accusation if Will ever heard one. He met Jack’s eyes and felt a coil of anger build in his chest. He wanted to snarl like a caged animal.

“Just look at that,” he snapped, jabbing a finger toward the scene, “I know that man. He just transferred from my precinct. His badge is part of the design. He’s wearing a dog collar with instructions to be brought to you. Everything was done with more care, with more emotion than they normally are. The flowers tie it back to the others of this sounder, so we can be sure it’s the Ripper. Everything else ties back to me.”

Jack nodded, seeming to accept that much at least.

“Tell me what you see,” he said.

Will took another breath.

“The badge is in his abdomen. He is saying that I have taken a responsibility to be an officer, first and foremost. The collar is a reference to how I’m known on the streets, but the tag refers to you. I’m the bloodhound, but I have a new hunting master. You and the FBI hold my leash now. That’s what he’s saying. I’m not sure about the cross or the flowers yet, but I’m right about this, Jack. Don’t think I’m not.”

Jack was not happy, but now he seemed to pity Will. Will hated it, but he didn’t have the presence of mind to begrudge Jack at the moment. He couldn’t clear the image from his mind.

“Jack. I need to clear my head a bit. Let me know when this is all in the lab, and I’ll come in to help. Just give me a few hours.”

Jack nodded, and Will thought it might actually be okay for Jack to pity him for just a bit. It would get him what he wanted faster.

Sweet Nothings

“Hello, Will,” Hannibal answered the phone, sounding amused that Will was calling him so soon after they had said goodbye.

“He knows who I am,” Will said, not sure if he sounded afraid or excited.

There was a beat of silence before Hannibal replied.

“The Chesapeake Ripper?”

Will laughed aloud despite himself. He was sitting in his car, outside his apartment, and everything seemed so surreal.

“Yes. He left this one for me. He knows me. I don’t know what he knows about me, but he is trying to send me a message. I just need to know about the flowers. I think that’s the key to figuring out what he means. I can’t believe this is happening.”

Hannibal was terribly quiet, and Will suddenly realized what he was saying, and who he was saying it to.

“Hell. Hannibal. I need to talk to you, but it needs to be in person. Can we do dinner tonight? I promise I’ll be there.”

Hannibal hummed lightly, and Will could picture the expression he wore.

“Yes, Will. I think that sounds like a very good idea.”

“Thanks. I really have to go now, but I’ll see you tonight.”

Will ended the call. He knew Hannibal didn’t really like it when he did that, but his mind was still reeling from everything that had happened.

Will went into his apartment and was greeted by his dogs. Rosco jumped up, having been left longer than Will normally would, and Bud was just about going crazy with excitement. Will grinned at them both and quickly clipped their leashes on.

A walk would be a good idea for all of them. They had only seen him for a moment that morning, and he had been gone since the night before. They needed out, and he needed to think.

The Chesapeake Ripper had left a message for him.

Will knew he shouldn’t be glad for it. He should be terrified. He should be on his way to a safe house with a fake identity. He should be hiding away with his dogs and praying that no one would be able to find him.

Instead, Will was grinning like an idiot as he walked his dogs to the park.

He felt like a fan who had the author write back to their gushing letter, saying that they thought he would be a good author in the future, and they should write to each other.

Will figured that would not be the best allegory to share with anyone, unless he wanted to get locked away.

The Ripper had noticed him. Of all people.

Something in him reminded him that the Ripper had also noticed all those people who had become his tableaus.

Another part of him thought that would be fine.

If he could choose a way to die, he actually would decide he wanted to be killed by the Ripper. Nothing else would leave him as artful. Nothing else would make his death worth it. He wanted to be part of a masterpiece.

This was very unhealthy.

Maybe he really did need a psychiatrist.

“Sweet Williams. This guy trying to tell you something?” Beverly teased, showing him a blossom she had taken from the scene.

Price turned to them as he walked by, and seemed to have a profound thought at that.

“Some kind of valentine, I’d say,” he said, “though I’m not sure he knows how to act like a normal person. He should have tried asking you out in a normal way. In person, maybe bring you some wine.”

They were joking. Jack hadn’t shared what Will had told him. They just thought it was all a funny coincidence. They didn’t mean any harm by their words, and Will couldn’t fault them for making the connections he himself had made. They just didn’t know how right they were.

It was a letter. A letter just for him. When he closed his eyes, he could almost see the words it wrote.

Sweet William,

You committed yourself to enforcing the law when you became a police officer. Now, you have let your chain be pulled by another master. This one, not so kind or forgiving. He commands with hardly a reward, and you will be crucified before you see the end of this. You split your attention between two masters, but it is I who command them both.

I have the power over life and death.

Will didn't see a signature there. He felt the Ripper would rather sign his own name if he ever decided to write an actual letter to anyone. He would not hide behind this guise if he chose to make actual contact.

This would only be temporary.

"Freddie Lounds wrote about me again, didn't she?" Will asked.

The others didn't seem to have been expecting that, of all things. They looked around at each other before Beverly walked over to a computer and navigated to Freddie's site.

"Yeah. She posted an article about you yesterday. Not the most favorable thing she's said about anyone. I don't think you are going to like this."

Will knew he wouldn't, but he needed to know. There was something there that had made the Ripper decide to warn him about working with the FBI.

Will Graham, commonly known as the bloodhound, working with the FBI?

Despite his success as a detective and field officer, the bloodhound seeks more fame. News has spread that the celebrity cop has been recruited by the head of the behavioral science department of the FBI to help track down and arrest the Chesapeake Ripper.

Why would a young, upcoming detective agree to work in the most competitive workplace of the country, if not as a grab for more attention?

Will Graham has been viewed these past few years as a local hero, keeping the crime rates low and the streets safer than ever. Is that really what his goal is? His success might be a result of inside resources, or of police tampering. Is everything he has done in the public eye merely a political move on his part in an attempt to gain notoriety? He is working his way up the ladder the easy way, it seems.

That was as far as Will bothered reading. He knew why the Ripper was warning him. People were going to read this. He already knew there was a fair percentage of the population who read her garbage. They would persecute him for her words and be a plague on him until everything blew over.

But Will still didn't know why the Ripper would care enough to warn him. It didn't quite make sense.

By all accounts, Will was trying to catch the Ripper. It didn't make sense for him to try sending messages, especially warnings, to the man trying to track him down.

It had to be some kind of game. The Ripper had to be playing with him. But to what end?

Jack walked in, his face set in resignation.

“Graham. My office. Now.”

Will sighed and nodded. He didn’t bother thinking of anything smart to say to him, feeling a bit lightheaded about everything.

Once they were in Jack’s office, he sat at his desk and motioned to the seat across from him. Will opted to continue standing, having too much nervous energy and not being able to shake the image of a disappointed chief from his mind. Chairs were for those doing poorly, and he was not.

“Tell me what you see,” Jack said.

Will took a shaky breath, and was glad everyone would see him as frightened rather than excited.

“He’s warning me,” Will said, “He is upset by the things Freddie Lounds wrote about me, and he’s telling me that I’ve put myself in a dangerous place. I’m serving two masters. My Chief, and the FBI. He thinks I’m going to have to choose a side. If I keep working like this, I’ll be crucified by Freddie Lounds and the press. He thinks I won’t catch him, and that’s the only way I would be saved.”

Jack pinched the bridge of his nose and sighed.

“That sounds crazy. You know how crazy that sounds. Why would he tell you that? It doesn’t even make sense. The local PD and the FBI are on the same side.”

Will bit his tongue, stopping himself from snapping at Jack in a way that could get him into trouble. He took a slow breath.

“Those aren’t the sides he is talking about. He is one of the sides. He thinks I’m splitting myself up between you and my precinct because I’m not choosing him. He thinks I want to choose him.”

This was bordering on dangerous for Will to say, but he didn’t feel like he was really the one in danger here. If anything, Jack would be in danger. He seemed on the verge of doing something foolish, and that could get someone killed if it had to do with the Ripper.

“Do you think he is going to try to contact you again?” Jack asked.

Will could tell he was seeing this as an opportunity. He wanted to set a trap. He wanted to have some bait.

“I think,” Will started carefully, “this is only temporary. He isn’t going to hide behind his murders for much longer if he continues to find me interesting. He will try to find a better way to send a message to me. I don’t know what that is yet. He might even decide to kill me, if I’m wrong about what the message here is.”

It was a horrifying and thrilling thought. The Ripper might be telling him he was next. He might decide to kill Will, and turn him into a masterpiece like the others. It sent a shiver up his spine, and he had to force his expression to remain neutral in front of Jack.

“If I find any evidence suggesting you are in danger, I’m putting you in a safe house until this all blows over,” Jack warned.

Will nodded. There wouldn’t be any arguing with him at the moment. He was confused, and determined. The only thing he was sure of was that he wanted to be in control again, whatever that took.

“I know you will,” Will replied softly, “and he will be angry, if I’m right about this.”

Jack huffed unhappily, but waved Will away.

Will walked back to the labs and his office. The team gave him worried looks, and they might have realized that their jokes were a bit too accurate. He didn’t really bother looking at them except to offer Beverly a half smile as he gathered his things.

He wanted to talk to Hannibal, but part of him dreaded it. He couldn’t stand it if Hannibal turned away from him because of all this, but he was the only one who might understand. He was the only one Will felt safe with. The only person Will could talk to about what was really going on.

Distractions

“So, the Chesapeake Ripper has taken notice of your work,” Hannibal said, preparing their food with his practiced ease, “What sort of message did he leave for you?”

Will kicked his legs lazily, feeling like a little kid waiting for Christmas as he sat on the counter beside where Hannibal was working.

“Did you see the new article about me on TattleCrime?” Will asked instead of answering.

A flash of distaste crossed Hannibal’s features, and Will almost laughed at him.

“Unfortunately yes,” Hannibal answered.

Will nodded.

“Well, so did he. He’s trying to tell me I’ve put myself in a tight spot. I’m working with the police and the FBI. The public is going to find out that I’m a “double agent”, and they aren’t going to like that. It’s sort of a warning.”

Hannibal stopped what he was doing and set both his hands on the counter beside his work. He looked at Will, and Will almost felt guilty for the lack of judgement he saw there.

“Why do you think he might be inclined to warn you?” he asked.

Will bit his lip.

That was the one thing he didn’t know. He didn’t know why the Ripper would care.

“I don’t know,” he confessed, his shoulders dropping, “It doesn’t make sense. I’m trying to catch him, and he’s leaving me notes. He might be mocking me. It might be some sort of sick game. I can’t see that part.”

Hannibal nodded, his expression unchanged. He went back to work.

“Do you believe he will continue to attempt to contact you in this way?”

Will thought about that. He wasn’t exactly sure. He didn’t want to say anything to hurt Hannibal, but he refused to lie to him. He wanted Hannibal to be prepared for things to continue to happen. Even if that meant he stopped seeing Will. It would be better for both of them, probably. It would protect him, at least.

“Maybe not in the same way. He usually works in sounders of three. This was officially three this round. If he decides to keep this up, he might wait a few months, and just start another sounder. If not, then he will find some other way to contact me. I’m not sure I want to know what that might be.”

Hannibal seemed to be very interested in the way Will had chosen to answer. He blinked slowly as he worked, and Will waited. He knew Hannibal would have something to say in a moment.

“Has he always been consistent in his modus operandi?” Hannibal said at last.

Will was a bit taken aback by that. He had expected Hannibal to ask if he is in danger, or warn Will to stop the case for his own protection. Even Hannibal asking him to relate what he saw, much the same way Jack did, would have been more expected.

“I-,” Will began, realizing he wasn’t actually as familiar with the Ripper as everyone, including himself, thought he was, “I don’t know. I’m going to find out, though. I’m not going to rest until I know the Ripper inside and out.”

Will didn’t care how obsessed, or odd that might have made him sound. He was with Hannibal. He was safe to say anything.

Hannibal smiled, sliding the chopped vegetables into a pan on the stove.

“Have you discovered what the flowers meant?” he asked.

That was a much more expected line of conversation, and one Will needed to talk about almost more than anything. Lucky for him, Hannibal had clearance for anything he needed to talk about.

“They were sweet Williams,” he answered.

Hannibal looked up from the stove, an eyebrow raised.

“Is that so?”

Will ducked his head, hoping Hannibal wouldn’t see the blush on his face as he thought about the scene. He was coming to the slow conclusion that he really shouldn’t be in the law enforcement field. He should probably be in a mental hospital to keep himself from ending up like the Ripper.

“Yeah. So, that pretty much sealed the deal for Jack. He was on my case for being narcissistic until Bev came back with that tidbit. Apparently, killers don’t send messages to policemen very often, unless the receiver of the message is the one that ends up with *his* guts in the flower bed. I’m pretty vain to think someone would do something like that for me.”

There was a silence, and Will looked up to see that Hannibal was absolutely fuming. He had never seen Hannibal so angry. His eyes seemed to glimmer red, and his jaw was set. Will felt like he was on the wrong end of a knife.

“Hannibal,” Will said tentatively, trying not to set him off.

Hannibal met his eyes, and they burned, but Will could see the anger was not directed at him. He was still safe here.

“Jack Crawford did not believe you?” he asked.

His tone was dangerous, and low. It was really starting to scare Will, who had never seen Hannibal anything more than mildly miffed.

“What?”

“The agent who asked for your help specifically, who has insisted you *prove yourself* to him despite that, did not believe you when you told him what you saw?”

Will was frozen in place. He laughed nervously, trying to break the tension a bit.

“Well, it’s not like he could see it, right?” he answered. Hannibal seemed to consider that, his eyes softening. “And the Ripper doesn’t seem the sympathetic type to him. It doesn’t make sense at first, for him to be trying to talk to me.”

Hannibal turned his eyes back down to their dinner, apparently conceding.

“Perhaps not,” he admitted, though he still seemed irked.

“Anyway, Jack knows now, and he threatened to send me to a safe house if it looks like I’m in danger.”

“That would be a bad idea,” Hannibal stated.

Will laughed.

“Yeah, for more reasons than one. I’ve got things to do, and it’s not like they can really keep me out of his reach. They’d be better off using me as bait, if it gets that far. I can’t say that would end very well either, though.”

Hannibal was considering it all with lips pressed together.

“Do you believe he intends to harm you?” he asked.

Will shrugged.

“If I get too close to him, or I pose any real threat to him, he probably will. I don’t think he is currently planning on it, but I can’t be sure. He might just be playing a game, like I said.”

Hannibal nodded thoughtfully, plating their food. They walked to the dining room together and Hannibal set their places.

“Do you worry what might happen?” he asked.

Will was always impressed by how professional Hannibal sounded. When they were talking like this, he always sounded like his psychiatrist self, and never gave away his personal opinions before Will gave him his.

It wasn't the same as the mask, though. He wasn't hiding himself. He was merely playing tennis with Will. He was waiting for the ball to come back into his court.

This question made Will hesitate, once again. He didn't want to lie, but he couldn't lose Hannibal. Not now.

"No," he said at last, "I'm not worried."

Hannibal raised an eyebrow. He seemed impressed and curious.

"Why are you not worried?" he continued, "there is a killer that seems to have recently set his eye on you."

Will shrugged, honestly not being sure. There were a disturbing amount of things recently that he was unsure of.

"If I'm honest, I think I wouldn't mind if he did end up killing me," Will confessed, decidedly looking at the centerpiece instead of at Hannibal. "He would make me into art, and what more could I ask? To be elevated in my death is more than some get. I don't fear death by his hand. No, not his. But I don't think he wants to kill me."

Hannibal was silent, and Will continued eating. He didn't want to meet Hannibal's eyes, just then. He didn't want to see the worry that would be there, or the fear as he realized exactly what Will was. He just wanted a few more days with him, if that was all he could have.

"Do you fear dying by the hands of *others* ?" Hannibal asked.

Will looked up and laughed out of surprise. He quickly swallowed the grin and wet his lips.

"Not really," he admitted, "I'm weird that way. I've never been very concerned about dying. It would certainly be disappointing to be killed by some druggie, but I'm not afraid. I probably should see someone about that."

Hannibal smiled, amused.

"You are already seeing a psychiatrist," he reminded.

Will laughed again.

"Not in a very orthodox way," he shot back, "I don't think many people would say I can be getting much therapeutic value out of this."

Will gestured between the two of them, and Hannibal ducked his head in dissent.

"I find comfort in the idea that my life could end at any moment," Hannibal confided, "it reminds me to make the most of the time I have."

Will swallowed a bite of food, and frowned. Something about that sobered him more than the previous topics.

“I wish *you* were afraid,” Will whispered.

Hannibal blinked, seeming surprised.

“Why is that?” he asked.

Will shrugged, looking down at his plate.

“I guess I want you to be careful. People are more cautious when they are afraid, and I could be putting you in danger. If the Ripper really wants to get to me, you would be the first one he would go after. I don’t want you to get hurt, or killed.”

Hannibal’s gaze softened. He looked at Will like he had hung the sun in the sky, and Will fidgeted a bit under his gaze.

“What would you do if the Ripper hurt me, Will?” he asked softly.

Will wet his lips before biting the lower one. He didn’t want to think about that. He didn’t want to think the Ripper meant to hurt him, but he knew it would be foolish to think he wouldn’t try to get at him any way he could.

“I don’t know,” he answered honestly, “at this point, I don’t know. He’s so deep in my head, I don’t know if I could make myself stop him. I don’t know if I could forgive him. I don’t know.”

Hannibal stood and walked around to Will, catching his hand in a loving caress.

“Let’s find something else to occupy your mind for the night, shall we?”

Will liked that idea.

Focus

Will stepped back and took a deep breath.

He had just spent the last few hours going through every case file he had concerning the Ripper, and he had taken the best pictures of each scene. He had put them up in chronological order, and he was looking at the timeline now.

He hadn't ever been new. As far back as the files went, none of the scenes looked amateur.

The Ripper had perfected his craft before any of these. Will didn't have his beginning. He didn't know everything.

Just like everyone said, there was nothing to link the victims to each other, or to anyone suspicious. The Ripper was careful. The Ripper was precise.

Where had he practiced?

Will was desperate to know the beginnings.

There was one scene that kept catching his eye, and he plucked the picture off the wall to look at it. He picked up the file it came from and flipped through it.

It had been found about a year and a half after the first one attributed to the Ripper.

The man was young, probably in his early twenties. He had dirty brown hair and it actually reminded Will a bit of his own as it fell in loose curls around his ears and almost to his jaw. It was lighter than Will’s but Will couldn’t help running a hand through his own hair as he looked at the scene.

The victim had his hands bound with thick rope, and his head was tipped back with his throat cut. He lay on a mound of rocks, and it reminded Will of an altar. There were small pieces of wood and branches laying under him. His heart had been removed, but the cavity had been stitched back up like nothing was amiss.

Will rubbed his eyes, trying to place the scene correctly. Images of sacrifices flipped through his head like a slideshow on fast forward. At the same time, passages of writing flipped through his mind, trying to match up with what was being shown.

One image paired up with a passage, and they stopped. Will looked at them, reading what lay there, and recognizing what the image showed.

The sacrifice of Isaac, by Abraham.

Will flipped through the file, looking for the name of the victim.

Isaac Matthews.

Will looked harder, reading everything there was to learn. He needed to know what made this man different. Something about him had prompted such a specific display.

The man had been religious, that much was obvious. He had given to the church he attended, and had spent much of his time at the building of worship. He had been a member of the choir, and had been praised by many for his righteous living.

All of this seemed fake.

There was something that Will couldn't quite pinpoint, but it didn't sit well with him. The man looked perfect to outside eyes, but he couldn't have been. No one was that good.

Will fell back into his dual movements. In reality, he stood, staring at the file. His other self moved around in the scene, creating it with precision.

The man was paralyzed. He could not move, and it was reminiscent of how the Isaac from the bible lay down willingly for the sacrifice. His face betrayed no fear, only calm acceptance. He grabbed a handful of the man's hair and pulled his head back to expose his throat, just like an unblemished lamb.

The only thing that would stay his hand now, was the intervention of an angel.

The angel did not always intervene in time.

This was the message meant by this killing. There were people who could not always be saved. God would let people perish if he did not have any reason for them to live. He would let them perish for the benefit of his elegant plan.

As the man gurgled and drowned in his own blood, Will's hand pulled a small crucifix from his pocket and placed it gently on the man's tongue.

You draw near to me with your lips, but your heart is far from me.

Will returned to himself.

The man was a fake. Will knew he would be able to track down people he had wronged, but there was no reason for him to. He knew what he needed. There was no reason to go digging up skeletons now.

At least not any from around here.

Will got onto his computer and quickly looked through news from outside the US from before the first confirmed Ripper kill.

He had to have perfected his craft somewhere else. Will would know the scenes if he found them. He just hoped he could find them.

He tried to narrow his search, having a hunch that it would be in Europe somewhere. It didn't narrow it down to a very small margin, but it was better than nothing.

He scoured news and crime sites for hours, feeling like his eyes might start bleeding at any moment. He drank coffee, not sure where the fifth and sixth cups had come from, but not caring that much.

There.

Italy.

The monster of Florence.

The primavera.

Will could only find some old, black and white, grainy photos. They were enough.

There was a comparison picture, showing the primavera in all its glory from its place in the uffizi gallery. Next to it was a crime scene photo, from above, showing the two dead lovers as Zephyr and Chloris. The detail and loyalty to the original was striking, and meticulous.

The monster was precise. He was dedicated. He was incredibly patient and purposeful.

He was the Chesapeake Ripper.

Will felt his pulse quicken, and he stood up with his laptop. He paced quickly, dividing his attention between the story on his screen and the pictures on the walls.

The Ripper had taught himself his craft while in Florence. He had recreated the primavera over and over, until it was perfect. He had learned how to do everything in just the right way. It was all practice, and it was all perfect.

Will quickly printed out all the crime scene photos he could find, and all the articles from the time. He put them up with the others, creating files for the killings they hadn't even known about.

Jack would call him crazy.

Will didn't know if he could tell Jack yet. He knew it would sound crazy. A serial killer getting away with how many he had, only to move across an ocean and change everything about how he operated.

It was odd for a killer to change his demographic, even more odd for him to change his method as well. No one in their right mind would believe Will.

Except maybe Hannibal.

Hannibal trusted his judgement, and would help him develop his theory. He could get it well enough developed to present to Jack. He just needed to talk to Hannibal.

“Knock knock,” Beverly said from the doorway.

Will looked up, unsure how long she had been there. She had her hip propped against the door frame, and her arms crossed with an amused smile on her face.

“Who's there?” Will asked in return, trying to cover the fact that he had missed her.

“Your coffee courier,” she replied, “waiting for a thanks.”

Will blinked. He was caught.

“Oh, sorry. Thanks. I guess I've been a bit distracted,” he apologized, setting his things on his desk.

“I'll say,” Beverly agreed, walking in and looking around, “you're more focused than Jack. What's with the older photos?”

Will looked up where she was staring. The primavera.

“Uh, I'm comparing and contrasting with other killers that have similar operations. I found this guy from Florence a while ago, and he's got the same artistic flare.”

Will felt a bit bad for lying to the only person who had actually been nice to him, but everything got back to Jack if he let it slip. He would tell her if he ever got to the point where he felt he could.

Beverly nodded thoughtfully.

“Sounds good, police boy. I actually came here to warn you. Freddie Lounds is really on your case right now.”

Will frowned, inwardly groaning. Was he ever going to be free from her?

He picked his computer back up and quickly opened her website. A picture of him, standing next to doctor Lecter in the opera house, greeted him. They were both holding champagne flutes and smiling at one of Hannibal's fancy friends.

That was going to be hard to explain.

Skimming through, Will found she was using his recent outing as a sign that he was trying as hard as he could to become a public hero and popular figure.

“That's not all,” Beverly said somberly, clicking to the previous article.

A picture of his crime scene. The one that was meant for him. He felt a rush of anger at the thought that everyone who read her garbage would see it. It wasn't for them. It was a gift for him.

A warning from the Ripper that seems to be aimed at detective Graham. A previous coworker of the bloodhound has met his end by the hands of the ripper. The way he was displayed pays

homage to the celebrity cop as we know him. Obviously, the ripper is warning him to keep away, leave the FBI, and stop looking for him. Despite this clear threat against the officer himself, there is no sign that detective Graham intends to let it lie.

Does he believe he can catch the ripper before more people die, just to send him another message? He is willing to risk our lives in order to be seen as our hero.

Will stared at the picture. It has been annotated, pointing out the collar, the badge, and the sweet Williams. Freddie was trying to crucify him. The ripper had been right.

“How did she get the picture?” Will asked.

Beverly huffed, folding her arms again.

“Jack is going to find out, and God help the soul who leaked it. They'll be lucky to still have skin when he's done with them,” she assured him, “but how do you feel? Are you going to leave us because of this? I wouldn't blame you.”

Will shook his head. That wasn't even a question in his mind. He was so close to the ripper. He couldn't let him go. Not now.

“I've never cared too much about public image,” he said, “but I'm worried this will make my job harder. People might not trust me.”

Beverly nodded sympathetically.

“Well, I hope everything works out. You're doing good work here, and it'll make the world a better place in the end.”

Will nodded.

Connections

“You go to the opera?” Matthew asked, sounding a bit colder than usual.

Will looked up at him. Something was definitely bothering his younger partner. Will wondered what his opera attendance had to do with it.

“Just the once,” Will replied, trying to seem busy, “but I wouldn't put much stock in the writing of Freddie Lounds. I warned you about her before.”

Matthew nodded, though he was still upset.

“What made you go, just the once?” Matthew asked.

Will wanted to sigh and tell him it was none of his business.

Be likable , he told himself. *Keep this partner.*

“A friend invited me, and I thought it would be fun. I get to pick the venue next time. I don't like being a topic of gossip.”

Matthew tapped his foot absently.

“So, you do socialize,” he surmised, “and you have friends. You tried to tell me you don’t.”

Will furrowed his brow.

Was Matthew seriously upset that he wasn’t hanging out with him outside of work?

Keep this partner. Keep this partner. Keep him.

“I said I keep home and work separate,” Will reminded him, “Not that I never leave to go anywhere other than work.”

“And that psychiatrist, Doctor Lecter, is your friend,” Matthew concluded.

Will nodded distractedly. He looked over files of cases, and made sure all the paperwork was in order after the arrest of Brandon Hart. Killers had been released on technicalities before, and Will was determined to never have that be the case with one of his.

“He’s alright,” Will agreed.

Matthew was silent for a moment before he walked away, and Will was glad he was gone. He hated it when people breathed down his neck while he worked, and Matthew didn’t even usually mean to. He just wanted to know everything.

“You look worn out,” Hannibal noted, turning another page of his book while Will continued to type away on this computer.

Will rubbed his hands over his face, planting his elbows on the ornate desk of Hannibal’s office. He knew he looked like crap. He hadn’t been sleeping very well, if at all, and he had spent hours upon days obsessing over the crime scene photos he had up around his office in the FBI building. The only breaks he had taken were to get fresh clothes and take the dogs out. They were starting to think he didn’t really live at the apartment any more.

“It’s that obvious?” he asked bitterly, sighing.

Hannibal put down his book and looked over Will appraisingly. The tilt of his head and the tiniest press of his lips let Will know what he thought.

“You’re upset with me,” Will said, dropping his head, “because I’ve been working myself to death.”

There was a light huff, and it sounded to be a mix of amusement and agreement.

“Your chief told me you tend to be a workaholic, as he put it. I had no reason to be concerned about it until now. Do you no longer feel underutilized? You are certainly not as well as you were before.”

Will chuffed lightly. Hannibal was right, and he was way too good at seeing things Will would rather he didn’t.

“Well, The Ripper tends to take a lot of energy to get to know,” Will admitted, “I think I’ve found him, from before. I think I found his kills from the beginning. Before he was the Ripper.”

There was a silence, and Hannibal was at Will’s side. He had gotten used to how Hannibal could walk soundlessly, and it was a comfort to find him nearby when he had been across the room moments ago.

“You are growing to know him,” Hannibal said softly, running a hand through Will’s curls, “all of him.”

Will nodded lightly, not wanting to shake the caress away.

“He was called Il Mostro,” He said, closing his eyes, “in Italy. He killed lovers, and recreated the abduction of Chloris from the Primavera. He was so precise, and dedicated. I wonder if I should try to contact the authorities over there and tell them he’s here now.”

Hannibal hummed softly, continuing his gentle brushing of Will’s hair.

“Have you told Jack yet?”

Will wet his lips and opened his eyes. He glanced up to Hannibal before answering.

“No. It doesn’t make much sense for me to say it. He wouldn’t understand. I was hoping you would be able to help me figure out the best way to tell him. Some way to make him believe me.”

Hannibal nodded.

“Tell me.”

The request was quiet, and paired with a soft kiss as Hannibal leant down. His hand was still in the hair on the back of Will’s head, and it massaged soft circles into his scalp.

Will closed his eyes again, thinking back to the pictures he had been burning into his eyelids for days.

“I knew he had to have perfected his art before what we have,” Will began, “and I could feel that it was probably Europe. It was a hunch, but I was right. Almost right up to the point we start having Ripper murders here, the Monster was still prowling Florence. The moment I saw the recreation of the Primavera, I knew it was the same killer. He had the same attention to detail. The same dedication to the craft. The same vision.”

Will found his other self walking through the halls of an art gallery. There were only a few other patrons, each keeping to themselves as they stood at whatever painting captured their attention. He had a specific destination, sparing the other art only an odd glance. The room at the end of the hall was softly lit, but the light was good enough to see the painting he was here for.

The Primavera was stunning, and captivating. More so in reality than in any of the pictures the papers were printing, or even in his own recreation. He sat before it, drinking in the sight.

Will gasped and jerked, opening his eyes in Hannibal’s office. Hannibal’s hands flew up to his face, turning it and locking their gazes together. His eyes shone with concern, and curiosity.

“Will. What did you see?”

Will swallowed. He hadn’t told Hannibal about how he saw the crimes he studied. He hadn’t told him how the Ripper was different, even in how Will could see him. It was so much different to see the Ripper than it was to see any of the other killers.

He needed Hannibal to understand, though.

“I have to start from the beginning,” Will confessed, taking one of Hannibal’s hands in his and just holding it as he continued, “I have to explain how I work on the job.”

Hannibal was quiet, and Will knew he would let him talk as long as he needed. Will took a deep breath and began.

“When I look at a crime, I can step into the shoes of the person as if I am them. I can see myself doing everything they do, and know why. My eyes look out from their skull. That’s how it works, and how I can catch them. I can become them.”

Hannibal was still silent, knowing this was not all Will needed to say. Will tapped his fingers gently against Hannibal's wrist, trying to pull his thoughts together.

"With the Ripper, it's different. I don't step into his body, and I don't look through his eyes. It's like I split, and become two people. One is the real me, doing what I am doing. The other is the Ripper, acting and thinking as the ripper does. I can see both through the other's eyes, and feel the actions as my own. I don't know why. Maybe it's because he's harder to understand than all the others. Maybe I just can't connect to him like other people."

Hannibal waited, testing to see if that was everything.

"Does this scare you?" he asked after a moment.

Will looked up at him.

"In a way," he said, tracing the bones in the back of Hannibal's hand, "but it's changing. Now, I sometimes feel like I'm doing the same things at the same time as he is. Drinking coffee, getting in bed, driving. It's like I never come back into myself, and I am just always split."

Hannibal continued his slow circles on Will's scalp, and Will had never known his scalp could be tense. It was odd how relaxing the soft massage was.

"Do you feel as if you are becoming him?"

Will bit his lip, trying to put it into the right words. He needed to make sure Hannibal understood him when he spoke.

"More like we are coming closer. Like we are conjoined, and our orbits are about to cross. The Ripper has had a place in my mind far longer than anyone else, but I'm starting to feel like he is expanding his space."

Hannibal hummed in understanding, and Will felt like maybe he really did. As strange as it would be, he felt like Hannibal actually knew what he meant by it all.

"Do you worry you may do something you will regret?"

Hannibal's words were ever soothing and calm. Will could fall asleep to the sound of his voice every night if given the chance. He hummed in reply, the sound noncommittal as he knew he couldn't quite answer that question very simply.

"I worry I will do something I *should* regret," he corrected, his voice growing soft as he began to relax more, "and that I won't regret it at all. I'm worried I'll forget who I am and fall into him."

There was a pause as Hannibal considered his words.

"And a moment ago, when you drifted away into your mind, did you feel as if you had fallen into him?"

Will closed his eyes, feeling once again like there was nothing he could hide from Hannibal. Or maybe it was that he didn't want to hide anything from him.

"I saw my other self walking through an art gallery. The Uffizi gallery in Florence. That's where the Primavera is. It was like I had been pulled into his mind, rather than walked in willingly. I saw and felt and thought as he did when he was there. I know he went there. Often. He would sit in front of the Primavera. He studied it as any artist would study their muse."

Will felt a slight hesitation in the caress in his curls, and he worried he had frightened Hannibal. He couldn't lose Hannibal.

"Perhaps it would be best to discuss how to approach Jack about this after you have had a proper meal and some rest," Hannibal suggested.

Despite the calm tone, Will knew there was no room for arguing. Hannibal could ask almost anything of him, especially while he was tired and strung out like this. Hannibal was the only one who could so easily convince Will to comply. Everyone else need be prepared for a fight if they tried.

Translation

“You know Italian,” Will said, leafing through the printouts of the old newspapers from Florence.

Hannibal looked up and lifted an amused eyebrow.

“Yes,” he replied, his tone prodding.

Will looked up and realized he hadn’t explained what he meant yet.

“I thought you might be able to give me a better translation of the articles,” he said, ducking his head a bit sheepishly, “I don’t know how reliable the internet can be for this.”

Hannibal managed to reign in a grimace at the idea of internet translations, and Will grinned. He was glad Hannibal was there. Hannibal made almost everything easier to work through, whether it was by actually helping, or just by his calming presence.

Hannibal plucked up an article and began to read. He read through it silently first, intent and curious. He took a piece of paper and began transcribing it.

Will was a bit disappointed. He had hoped Hannibal would read it aloud to him. Hannibal’s voice was comforting and grounding. He liked to hear him talk. He knew it was more practical to have it written, though.

“No new killings have taken place?” Hannibal asked, his tone conversational as he continued to translate the article.

Will shook his head as he organized the papers yet again. He felt he was becoming a bit obsessive, but he didn’t care.

“Ripper or otherwise,” he said, “I don’t know if I should be disappointed or glad. I’m certainly glad nothing else has come along to make Jack take me from this work, but I had hoped to hear from the Ripper by now. One way or the other.”

Hannibal hummed in agreement.

“It must be rather off putting to know there is a killer roaming around, his attention turned to you, without knowing what will happen in their regard.”

Will nodded. It wasn’t really that which was bothering him. He knew Hannibal understood that. Hannibal was probably just as crazy as Will for not being bothered by Will’s odd relationship with the Ripper.

“Hopefully I can figure out what all of this means before he decides to show me what will happen,” Will said, trying to sound more like a cop, and less like a needy child, “I know it has to mean something. It has to *lead* somewhere.”

Hannibal looked up from his work and tipped his head at Will in a way that let Will know he thought Will was being ridiculous.

“What do you intend to do, if you find the Chesapeake Ripper before you tell Jack about this lead?” he asked.

Will froze, his hands hovering over the papers he was moving about for no reason. He swallowed nervously and couldn’t meet Hannibal’s eyes.

“I don’t expect to get that far,” he answered.

There was a beat of silence before Hannibal spoke again.

“You expect the Ripper will end up killing you,” he concluded, “before you have the chance to truly find him out.”

Will nodded. It was only half the truth, but it was still right. He thought the Ripper would protect himself by killing Will if it ever came to that. Will wasn’t sure he would ever get to the point where he was an actual threat, though. He didn’t feel any closer to catching the man, despite how close he felt to him in almost every other way.

“He’s not going to let anyone put him in jail,” Will said, “even if he sees me as an interesting toy. His freedom is the most important thing to him.”

Hannibal considered this for a moment, and Will felt like he was standing on a raft in the eye of a storm. Every time he was honest with Hannibal, he was letting the other man decide what would happen. Will wasn’t sure what would happen if Hannibal decided to leave him, but he was desperate to not find out.

Why did their conversations always end up at this point, where Will had to give Hannibal the power to destroy him?

“Have you considered there is an alternative?” Hannibal asked, his tone still quiet and casual despite the topic.

Will pressed his lips together. Sure. He had thought about it. He had maybe even hoped, or dared to dream of it. He just felt he couldn’t afford to be that foolish.

“Do you mean the alternative where the Ripper does not think I will arrest him, and will instead join him as some sort of apprentice or partner?” Will asked, glancing up to look at Hannibal.

Hannibal looked curious, and intent on watching Will.

“So it has crossed your mind,” Hannibal prodded.

Will shrugged.

“Yeah. I thought about it. It’s not that I think it’s impossible,” he explained, “I just think it would require too much assumption on my part. It would be foolish for me to count on that

being his motivation for contacting me, when it only happened once, and there is no other evidence to suggest he does, or even can, feel that way about another person. I'm trying to stick to what is probable. That just doesn't fit the bill."

Hannibal nodded and dropped his gaze back down to the translation.

"Will!"

Will grimaced before plastering a polite smile to his face and turned to greet his neighbor. Franklyn jogged up to him, and Will wondered what was urgent enough that he would exert himself.

"Good afternoon, Franklyn," he said, trying to do what Hannibal did to seem pleasant.

Franklyn stopped and caught his breath before speaking.

"You haven't been around much recently," he said, "I guess you're really busy, with the FBI on top of your usual work. People have been around to ask about you, so I guess you're getting the notoriety you always deserved."

Will frowned.

"Who's been around asking about me?" he asked, dreading the answer.

"Oh, you know. A young man and a lady from the FBI," he said with a shrug, "Everything was very professional. I promise I only told them the best about you."

Will ran a hand over his face. He didn't need this right now.

"Just tell me the lady didn't have red hair," he said, trying not to beg.

Franklyn furrowed his brow and tipped his head.

"She did. How did you know? Is that bad? Do you not like her?"

Will took a deep breath and had to mentally prepare himself for what he had to do.

"Franklyn. That was Freddie Lounds. She's a liar, and she'll do anything to get a story. She writes that crime blog, TattleCrime. Don't talk to her if she comes back. Please. Do that for me. Avoid Freddie."

Franklyn looked like he had just been given a trophy, drinking in the words Will was using like they were nectar from the gods.

"Of course, Will. Anything. I'm sorry I didn't know. Do you need me to do anything else?" Franklyn asked, his gaze intent and obsessed.

Will shook his head and turned to his door at last.

“Just don’t talk about me with anyone. I have to go do damage control now,” he said.

Will got into his apartment, greeting the dogs with a grin. He was happy to see them, despite everything else that was happening. They were happy to see him, unaware of everything else.

“Alright, guys,” Will said, “let me make a few calls, then we can go on a walk.”

Will made a quick call to Jack to let him know that Freddie had been basically stalking him. He didn’t think Jack would be able to do anything about it, but it would be good for him to know. Will wanted him to know so it couldn’t be held against him later.

Immediately after, Will called Hannibal. He held the phone to his ear with his shoulder as he gathered the leashes and got the dogs ready for a walk.

“Will,” Hannibal’s voice came warmly through the phone.

“Hey, Hannibal,” Will said, heading out the door with the dogs, “I just thought you would want to know. Lounds was poking around here at the apartment. She convinced Franklyn she was FBI. I don’t know what he might have told her, or what she might know. It’s probably going to end up concerning you, so I figured I’d let you know. I think I’m gonna have to tell Jack about us. You might not be able to keep your clearance for the cases.”

There was a moment of silence, but Will knew Hannibal was still there.

“Do you feel safe, Will?”

Will laughed aloud, stopping at a corner to wait for traffic.

“I never feel safe. Who are you asking about? Do I feel safe from Freddie? Yeah. I can handle her. From the Ripper? No, but you know how I feel about that.”

Hannibal hummed on the other end.

“Do you think the Ripper *wants* you to be afraid of him, Will?”

Will walked a few meters before answering, letting his thoughts cement.

“I think he’s curious. I don’t think he wants me to be afraid, but he wanted to know if I would be. He wants to see what I’ll do in the face of everything I should be afraid of.”

They were at the park, and Will quickly checked to make sure no one would be bothered by the dogs before he let them off the leads. They darted off to roll in the grass, and Will switched the phone to his other ear as he watched them.

“He’s testing me.”

Will hadn’t realized he said it aloud until he heard a quiet hum from Hannibal through the phone. It hadn’t occurred to Will before that maybe it wasn’t just a game. Maybe he wasn’t being taunted or poked at. Maybe the Ripper was lonely.

“What do you think the results of the test will determine?” Hannibal asked, unaware of the storm that had just begun in Will’s mind.

“Whether I’m good enough,” Will said, not missing a beat.

There was a surprised silence from the other end, and Will felt like he was trapped on a boat at sea in the middle of a storm. The whirlwind ripped around his head and stirred up images and thoughts he hadn’t realized he had kept in there this long.

“Good enough for what, Will?”

Hannibal was the anchor that kept Will from being torn from the harbor into the open ocean, his voice dragging Will’s thoughts into something he could articulate.

“Companionship,” Will said, not quite believing his own words, “he’s lonely. God, I can’t believe I didn’t see it before. All this time, he’s been doing what he does, working and creating and destroying, but he’s alone. No one understands why he does what he does, no one knows him as he is. He’s the most lonely man in the world. He wants someone who can understand him, so he won’t be alone anymore.”

Hannibal was silent, and for the first time ever, Will worried he might have hung up the phone. Hannibal had never done that before, but Will had never sounded so crazy. He would have been justified in stopping the conversation right then, and avoiding Will like the plague.

When Hannibal spoke again, it almost made Will jump out of his skin with surprise and relief.

“What will you do?”

Will laughed. He actually laughed. He didn’t know why, but it was like the sky had opened up and he could finally see the stars again. Rosco and Bud trotted over and plopped down next to Will in the grass, looking up at him happily.

“I guess I’ll just have to show him I’m good enough,” Will answered. There wasn’t really anything else he could have said. He didn’t have a plan, really.

“I’ll talk to you later,” Will said, ending the call and sitting in the grass next to the dogs.

He petted them distractedly. He was far away, not completely capable of bringing his mind back to the present. His thoughts still swirled and settled, before being stirred up again.

The Chesapeake Ripper wanted Will to meet him. He wanted Will to understand him. He wanted to see and be seen.

How could Will show him he could do it?

Frustrations

“Will. Get over here, now,” Jack said.

Will picked up his things and listened to the address Jack gave him. He had already gotten dressed in his police blues, preparing to go into the station for the day. He was out the door as fast as he could manage, and he only offered Franklyn a quick wave to keep him off as he got in the car. He didn’t have time to be stopped by his neighbor. He had a crime scene to get to.

Will felt his heart race as he drove. He had been waiting for another Ripper scene, and he was dying to see what the next message would be. He was so close to the Ripper now, Will knew he would leave him another message.

“Will,” Jack said, waving him over before he could get inside the house, “I want to make sure you’re prepared. It’s not pretty.”

Will nodded, keeping his eyes down and trying not to show Jack how anxious he was. He just wanted to see it.

Will was finally allowed inside, and his heart immediately sank.

It wasn’t the Ripper. Jack was putting him on another case. A new killer. Will didn’t want to be here anymore.

Will inwardly groaned, walking farther in and forcing himself to take in the details of the scene.

Blood on the wall. Arterial spray. Supine body. Throat cut. Hands cut off.

It was the hands that had brought Will here. Jack would have seen it as a signature of a serial killer, and would want to get a profile as fast as possible. They might have another scene that was similar, making Jack more desperate to catch the killer.

Will closed his eyes. He knocked on the door of the apartment, and looked up at the man who answered the door. The man recognized him, not as an individual, but as an authority figure. Will ordered the man to turn around, to face away from Will. The man complied as they both stepped into the apartment, away from prying eyes.

Even if Will were seen, it would not have been questioned. It was a bright day, and his presence would seem natural. Will grabbed the man’s hair and tipped his head back to slit his throat. He made sure the cut was from ear to ear, ensuring a quick death. The blood sprayed everywhere, and Will let the man fall to the floor. Once the blood stopped gushing, he got to work on the hands.

This was his design.

“The victim is a thief,” Will stated, turning to Jack and being careful not to step in the large pool of blood, “The punishment for stealing: having his hands cut off.”

Jack crossed his arms and stared at Will. Will wondered if his impatience was too obvious.

“What about the killer?” Jack asked.

Will shrugged.

“I hate to say it, but they’re probably law enforcement. Likely just a street cop. They did this during the day, and they knew their presence wasn’t going to seem out of the ordinary. They also managed to subdue the victim without a struggle. They probably had a gun. They weren’t faking it, because if they weren’t a cop, they would have just shot him. The gun is too easy to trace if it’s the one you get from the precinct. They did this as their own form of justice. Vigilante. This guy managed to slip through the cracks, and they wanted to fix it.”

Jack was predictably unhappy with that. He glared at Will. Will tried not to tap his fingers on his leg as he kept his gaze down near Jack’s shoes.

“So, they thought it was fair to kill him for stealing?” Jack demanded.

Will pressed his lips together. It really was a bit much, but the killer thought it was just.

“It’s possible he was a violent sort of thief,” Will admitted, glancing back to the body, “and might have hurt or killed someone. His preferred crime was stealing, or robbery. Killers don’t always make perfect sense, Jack.”

Jack chuffed unhappily and nodded.

“I don’t think they ever do,” he agreed.

Well, that wasn’t fair. No wonder the FBI hadn’t caught the Ripper yet. They thought he shouldn’t make perfect sense. The fact that he made so much sense only made them sure they misunderstood him. They couldn’t see what was right in front of them, because they didn’t think it should be there.

“Alright. You good here?” Will asked, “I have paperwork to do on a murderer I arrested a few weeks back. Let me know who the victim is when it’s confirmed.”

Jack waved him away, still seeming unhappy about everything. Will was glad he had an excuse to leave. Jack probably would have liked to keep him there for the entire process of collecting evidence.

Will knew Hannibal had a few open hours in just a bit, so he made his way immediately over to his office. He sat in the waiting room, thinking about the scene he had just been at. It wasn’t unheard of for a police officer to take the law into his own hands, but it was always something they tried to keep under wraps.

Hannibal opened the door with a smile, his eyes darkening when they lit on Will. His expression faltered, but it was with a ripple of hunger rather than anything unpleasant.

Will stood up and met him in the doorway, smiling as well.

“Something wrong, Doctor?” he asked, walking past Hannibal into the office.

Hannibal watched his movements with his dark eyes, seeming to be calculating something. Will raised an eyebrow at him after a moment of silence.

“Somehow, I have managed to never see you in uniform,” Hannibal said, his voice a bit rougher than usual.

Will looked down at his blues and grinned. He let out a sharp laugh and ran a hand through his hair as Hannibal stepped closer.

“So, you’re into the uniform look? Figures. Maybe I should have worn it more before now,” Will joked.

Hannibal hummed, leaning forward and brushing his nose along Will’s hairline. He breathed in and Will knew he was trying to figure out where he had been already that day. It was something he always liked to do.

“You are very distracting,” Hannibal said, “and you have already been to a crime scene today?”

Will nodded softly.

“Yeah. Jack dragged me to one first thing this morning. I was supposed to be at the station today, though, so I went in my blues. Jack seems to think all killers are alike.”

Hannibal pulled back slightly to look Will in the eye. He raised an eyebrow curiously.

“Does he? I should have thought he would know better than that.”

Will shrugged.

“He thinks he does,” he explained, “but he said killers don’t make sense. He of all people should know there are some that make far too much sense.”

Hannibal nodded.

“What about this current case made Jack question the reasoning of the killer?” he asked, pulling Will over to where the couch was.

Hannibal slipped off his shoes so he could sit on the couch sideways and pulled Will down to lay against his chest. Will felt his entire body relax, and he unintentionally sighed as his eyes slipped shut.

“He thinks it was unfair of the killer to murder they man for stealing. I know the victim was a thief, because the killer cut off the guy’s hands. I told Jack he might have been a violent burglar, but he still thinks it was overkill.”

Will started to giggle at his own words, and Hannibal huffed slightly, running his fingers up and down Will's arms. Will knew he could tell what was making him laugh, and he felt a bit bad for acting so silly.

"Sorry," Will said, taking a breath, "That's disrespectful. I think I'm just tired. I need more coffee."

Hannibal hummed in agreement, but not to the suggestion of coffee.

"Humor helps us to defend against less pleasant feelings. You are perfectly in the right for your reaction. I do think you need more rest, though."

Will hummed noncommittally, but his eyes were still closed and his limbs felt incredibly heavy. The soft rise and fall of Hannibal's chest against his back was very soothing.

"I've been taking more breaks," he defended without much energy, "spending more time at the apartment with the dogs. I've been trying to get more sleep."

Hannibal nuzzled through Will's hair, and Will could almost feel his relief at the information. Hannibal knew Will would work himself to death, but he didn't want it to happen on his watch. Will felt a bit guilty for making him worry.

"You still have not been eating well enough, and I have hardly seen you in days," Hannibal murmured into his hair, making Will feel even worse for it, "I have only been able to hope you were resting."

Will turned over and buried his face into Hannibal's chest. It was so warm, and Hannibal smelled so good. He smelled like kitchen spices and warm wood. Will breathed it in deeply.

"I'm sorry," he said, "You don't deserve that. I shouldn't make you worry. I just have to find out what everything means. I know it has to mean something. I'm so close."

Hannibal pressed kisses to Will's head, one after the other.

"Allow yourself to forget. Just for one night. Forget the work, and forget the deaths. Let me take care of you."

Will smiled sleepily.

"I have to be at the department in just an hour or so. I would love to stay here like this, but we both have work to do. I only had time to come by and talk."

Hannibal chuckled softly at the words. Will knew it was because this was already more than just a talk.

"Then go, and come back to me," Hannibal said quietly into Will's hair.

Will nodded and pushed his head up under Hannibal's chin.

“Where else would I go?” he asked, taking another deep breath, trying to fill his lungs with Hannibal.

Will could feel the smile against his hair.

Monsters

Chapter Summary

Very Sleepy Will

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Good evening, Will," Hannibal said, letting Will inside.

Will smiled at him, but the exhaustion was starting to weigh him down. He shuffled through the door and Hannibal led him to the dining room.

Hannibal must have predicted that Will would be too tired to watch the entire preparation, or help in any way. He had everything already prepared, and Will almost cried with happiness at the sight and smell of actual food. Hannibal rubbed a few small circles into Will's shoulder as he took his seat at the table.

"God, Hannibal," Will said, breathing in the amazing smells, "I'm so sorry. I can't even promise to be good company tonight. I'm so out of it."

Hannibal took his own seat and only smiled to Will.

"Regardless of your conversational ability, I am always pleased to be in your presence, Will," he said, "and there is no reason for you to apologize. Your exhaustion only shows your dedication to your profession."

Will laughed sharply, feeling his head bob a bit as his neck felt too weak to hold it up.

"Or it shows my obsession with the Ripper," he said, smiling sourly.

Hannibal tipped his head and watched as Will tiredly picked up his fork and began eating.

"Do you think you are truly obsessed with this killer?" he asked.

Will shrugged.

"Well, I can't stop thinking about him. I was disappointed when I got to the crime scene this morning, because it wasn't one of his. Isn't that crazy? I wanted it to be the most prolific serial killer we have out there, instead of the sad lowlife it was. I didn't want to think about the scene, because I didn't want it to distract me from the Ripper case. Every moment I am awake, and most of the time even while I'm asleep, my thoughts are consumed by the killings."

Hannibal chewed a bite of the food slowly, and left Will to think about what he had just confessed.

Oh God. He had just said all of that out loud. He really did need more sleep. The food was so good. He had almost not even noticed how supernaturally good the food was that he had been putting in his mouth. He couldn't remember ever being that tired.

"What do you dream of?" Hannibal asked.

Will *really* loved how Hannibal never made it sound like he was angry with Will for how he thought or felt. He was so accepting, and just genuinely curious. Will loved it.

"Sometimes, they're nightmares," he confessed with a sigh, "I've had nightmares since I can remember, so that's nothing new. But since I started helping the FBI, since I started on the Ripper case, I have had more pleasant dreams."

Will's eyelids threatened to close, almost as if offering to help him see the dreams he was trying to remember.

"Sometimes, he kills me. These aren't always nightmares when he does. He whispers to me as he removes my heart, and he lets me eat some of it. It's sweet, and melts on my tongue like Meringue. I can't hear his voice, really. It's more like a vibration that I feel in my head. Sometimes, he doesn't kill me. In these dreams, he leads me through the darkness, lighting the way with fireflies. Every time he takes a step, it pools with blood. I can smell the salt and iron in the air as I place my feet in the same places he does."

Hannibal was silent, and Will's eyes had eventually fallen closed. His hand lay limply next to his plate, too weak to lift the fork to his mouth again. He felt like a ventriloquist's dummy, incapable of independent action, but speaking despite it.

"I wish people didn't call him the Ripper," Will said, surprising himself. He hadn't meant to say it, but Hannibal always made him comfortable enough to say whatever came to mind.

"Why?" Hannibal asked, his voice soft.

Will hummed.

"There are so many killers with that title. Jack the Ripper, The Gainesville Ripper, the Ypsilanti Ripper, The Yorkshire Ripper. He just deserves something more unique. More… him."

Hannibal hummed in consideration, the sound almost lulling Will to sleep right there at the table.

"Why do you think he has been dubbed so?"

Will knew this one.

"They don't know what else to call him. He has no traceable motive, no target demographic, nothing identifiable. The press calls him Ripper to dredge up the memories of terrible crimes.

It's the blanket term for terrible killer, nowadays. Even in Italy, all they could think to call him was monster."

Hannibal was beside him, and carded his fingers through Will's hair gently. Will leaned his head back into the touch, almost asleep as he sat there.

"What would you call him?" Hannibal whispered.

Will considered it, his thoughts feeling slippery in his sleepy state. He clutched at them, feeling the answer was important enough he had to do it properly.

"Peryton," he decided at last.

Truly, Will could see it. The Ripper in the form of such an incredible beast, antlers extending above his elegant feathered wings. The soft clop of hooves as he led Will somewhere into the darkness before them. Tearing hearts from his victims to consume them fresh.

Will jolted in his seat, making his fork clatter against the plate. He whipped his head around quickly and stared up at Hannibal.

"He's eating them."

Hannibal tipped his head sharply, furrowing his brow and placing a hand flat against the back of Will's head to hold him still. His eyes were searching, and Will felt adrenaline shoot through his system as he stood from the table and his heart started to pound.

"The surgical trophies. He's not keeping them. He's eating them. The Chesapeake Ripper is eating the organs. I can't believe I didn't realize before. I have to tell Jack."

Hannibal placed a hand on Will's chest and stopped him as Will tried to walk past to make the call.

"Will. Tonight is for you to forget. Jack will still be there in the morning, and The Ripper will not go anywhere either. You know that much. Please, let yourself forget, just for tonight. You need rest."

Will's head was spinning, but Hannibal's words pierced through the swirling thoughts and he grew pliable in Hannibal's grip as Hannibal lowered him back into his chair. Will couldn't say anything, his thoughts only scattered frantically around inside his skull.

Will made no attempt to complain when Hannibal slowly lifted a bite of food to his lips with the fork. Will only opened his mouth and accepted the food. It was still delicious enough to make him consider it had to be witchcraft. He couldn't say anything, only staring into Hannibal's eyes as he smiled and lifted more food for Will to eat.

Will felt his stomach reacting to the presence of real, good food, and he sat quietly as Hannibal began to speak softly to him.

"The Peryton is an interesting choice. There is very little known truly about it, as a myth or creature of old," Hannibal began, "though it was ruthless in its attack. It would eat the heart

directly from its prey, using either talons or antlers along with its fangs. Is that how you see the Ripper, Will?"

Will finally found his voice, though it was weak and quiet.

"They also cast a shadow of a man," he added.

Hannibal smiled, though Will couldn't be sure if it was for him finally speaking or for the comment.

"Indeed. What do you see when you imagine the Ripper? Is it this creature?" Hannibal asked, preparing another bite for Will.

"He pretends to be a man, a creature of prey, but he isn't. He is so much more. He is a god of death in his own right."

Hannibal fed the last bite of food to Will and pulled him upright. Will could barely stand, but Hannibal supported him as they walked to the bedroom, where the final remnants of the adrenaline seeped out of Will's blood. He fell, still fully clothed in his police blues, onto the bed and almost immediately passed out.

The last thing Will saw before his eyes closed was the amused and affectionate smile of Hannibal as he knelt to pull Will's shoes from his feet.

Will's phone rang, and he groaned tiredly. He turned over in the bed to search the bedside table for the ringing device. Hannibal would have put it there safely when he helped Will out of his clothes the night before.

There was a movement from the man beside him as Will looked at the empty table. He furrowed his brow as he heard Hannibal sit up.

"Good morning, Jack," Hannibal said.

Will snapped around and saw Hannibal with Will's phone to his ear, talking as if it was perfectly natural for him to do so.

"No, I'm afraid everything is not alright," Hannibal continued after a few words from Jack on the other end, "I invited Will over for dinner last night, and he was far too exhausted for me to allow him to drive home. I have forbidden him from answering your call today until I am sure he has rested thoroughly. He will do no one any good if he cannot keep his eyes open or his head up."

Will could do nothing but gawk at Hannibal as the man listened to something Jack was saying in reply. Hannibal didn't seem overly concerned with anything, his hand lifting to twirl his fingers through Will's hair as he listened.

"Yes. Thank you. I will let him know, and I will release him from my care as soon as I am sure he is fit to return to work. I will be contacting his chief of police as well, I assure you."

With that, Hannibal ended the call and placed the phone back on the table on his side of the bed. He turned to look at Will with an expectant look, as if he was unsure how Will would react, but it didn't matter too much. His fingers continued to comb through Will's hair as if of their own accord, and he seemed terribly pleased with himself.

"You bastard," Will said when his voice finally came back to him, "Now I can't tell them you were lying unless I decide to out us both to everyone. You absolute bastard. You planned that, didn't you? Now I have no choice but to take the day off."

Hannibal smiled, his other hand lifting to join the other in the gentle caresses of Will's hair.

"You look so pleasantly debauched," Hannibal said, instead of answering the accusation, "and all you have done is sleep. Is it unforgivable of me to want you to be taken care of?"

Will pressed his palms into Hannibal's shoulder, shoving the other man down as he used the force to drag himself to a looming position. He looked down at Hannibal, who still had both hands tangled in his hair, which was now falling in front of his face as he scowled.

"Maybe not unforgivable," Will said, his voice low, "but terribly selfish of you to want to be the one to take care of me yourself."

Hannibal grinned up at him, and Will ducked down to kiss him. Hannibal's hands tightened in his hair and held him in place.

Chapter End Notes

I went through 13 pages of google results looking for more information about Perytons. They are so very hard to find. I hope you all liked this chapter.

Admirer

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will felt entirely refreshed by the time he walked back into the station. Hannibal had made good on his promise of taking care of him, forcing him to eat and rest as much as Will would comply.

Will was in a remarkably good mood as he made his way to his desk, even smiling and humming to himself as he plopped the new file down to start going through it. He couldn't remember ever feeling that well.

"Have a good day off?" Matthew asked, standing next to Will's desk with his arms folded.

For some reason, Will could tell he was not pleased with the idea. Will looked up and raised an eyebrow at his partner. Matthew seemed more tired than usual, but only by a margin.

"I did. I hadn't even meant to take a day off, but it looks like it's just what I needed. I hope nothing terribly important happened while I was gone."

Matthew's gaze raked up and down Will's form, and he wanted to flinch, pull away from it. He stood still, defiantly not allowing himself to show his discomfort.

"Agent Crawford asked me to work with you on your new case," Matthew said, his tone flat and bland, "the man with the missing hands. Crawford told me yesterday that they have a new body, but he didn't want me coming in without you."

Will nodded, picking up a few things from his desk and preparing to make his way to Quantico.

"Well, I guess that means we're on the clock whether we're here or there. You want to head over? Sounds like you're ready to get on board with Jack and the team."

Truthfully, Will wasn't too pleased to be bringing Matthew with him. Matthew didn't have any skills the team was in want of, and Will didn't see any reason for him to be there. He knew why Jack had asked for him to come, but it didn't make him any more happy with it.

Matthew nodded and Will drove them both over in a squad car. He could feel the stress building up again in his shoulders and knew Hannibal would scold him for it the moment he had a chance. He had made sure Will was completely at ease before letting him get back to work.

Zeller and Price didn't seem to approve of Matthew's presence any more than Will did, each raising an eyebrow at him when he followed Will into the lab. Will decided to try to ignore him as much as possible to try to get the job done.

The body was like the last one. Throat cut from behind. Hands sawn off. Will could see that once again, the sawing had been done with a wildly too small knife for the job. Probably the same one as had been used to cut the throat. The bone wasn't cut, the amputation having been made exactly at the joint. He had only had to cut through tendons and cartilage.

"I know this one," Will said, glancing up at the face of the victim.

Jack walked over from his looming position to look over the body with Will.

"Know him in the same way as that cop?" he asked, sounding on the edge of dangerous.

Will shook his head.

"No. I never met him in person. He was a big case, though. Serial burglar. Left several serious injuries in his path, but we could never get enough evidence to convict. He walked free every time. I told you this killer is after thieves. People justice didn't manage to reach until now."

Jack was furious, and Will had to keep reminding himself that the anger wasn't directed at him. Jack was just frustrated. Jack used his anger to motivate him. He worked better when he was angry. To a point.

"You call this justice?" he asked in a harsh whisper.

It was odd to hear Jack whisper, even if it was as angry as that.

"To the killer," Will said, straightening his back, "It is. I told you. He has to work in law enforcement. Just a street cop. No one higher would bother with these guys. They're just gutter trash. The killer gets to know who keep finding the loopholes, and he cinches them like nooses. He thinks he's just doing his job as an officer."

Jack chuffed and looked up at Zeller.

"Have anything for me yet?" he asked, making Zeller jump.

"Ah, yes, hold on," Zeller said, turning back to his table and picking up some papers and a file.

Zeller read off some information while Will watched Matthew.

Matthew walked farther into the lab with caution, as if something might pop out and scare him at any moment. He approached the body on the table and peered over it the same way he had looked at the crime scene photos Will had shown him. Like he wasn't sure if he was allowed to touch, or even look.

Matthew's gaze didn't spend long on the stumps of the arms. Instead, it continued flicking back and lingering on the gash that spread from one ear of the victim to the other.

"You know," Price piped in, always open to sharing unwanted information, "This is where the term from ear to ear comes from. Cutting someone's throat."

“Make sure you sever the arteries and the airway,” Matthew continued for him, “they bleed and choke to death at the same time. More efficient this way.”

Price seemed a bit sad he hadn’t been the one to say all of that, and Matthew looked up. He offered the agent a smile that was blinding.

“Bit of a nerd, I guess,” he offered as apology.

“Huh. You look more like a body builder than any nerd I’ve seen,” Price replied, raising an eyebrow at the young officer, “how do you find the time to bet that ripped?”

Matthew laughed and engaged in conversation as easily as anything.

Will wandered off into his own thoughts.

Matthew wasn’t really so terribly strong looking. He might have well toned muscles, but that was only meant to look strong. Anyone who knew anything would know how to tell someone who was strong from someone who looked muscular.

Matthew was pretty small statured too, not like Hannibal. Hannibal was strong, with broad shoulders that wouldn’t catch the eye of anyone unless they were looking for it. Or if they happened to see him cooking. Will loved seeing the way his shoulders rolled and flexed as he worked at the counter. Hannibal looked soft to just about anyone, but he had more strength than most.

“Earth to Graham,” Beverly said, waving her hand in front of Will’s face.

Will jumped slightly.

“Ah. Sorry Bev. You have something?”

Beverly raised an eyebrow at the shortened name. Will hadn’t ever called her that, but he had known she wouldn’t mind. She was pretty relaxed in that way.

“Yeah. Come over here and take a look.”

Will glanced over at Matthew, who was still deep in his conversation with Price, though they seemed to be talking about insects now instead of workout routines. Will didn’t know how they managed to get there, but he also didn’t really want to.

Beverly pulled him over to a table that was littered with tiny bits of things. Trace evidence. Beverly’s expertise.

“So, you think the guy’s law enforcement?” she asked, walking around so the table was between them.

Will looked over the bits of things on the table, using it as an excuse not to meet her eyes. He knew she wouldn’t mind that either.

“I know he is,” Will replied, sounding more confident than he really felt, “The first guy wasn’t covered by the press. He would have to have found out through the department. That’s how he’s picking his victims. He thinks he’s doing us all a favor.”

Beverly nodded.

“Well, I’ve got a thing for you then,” she said, picking up a little bit of something with a pair of tweezers, “It’s Teflon. Bit of a bullet proof vest. Only the type issued to police officers.”

Will nodded.

“So our guy was prepared to get into a fire fight if it came to it,” he said, “and something managed to tear it?”

Beverly nodded.

“This was stuck in the laceration on the neck,” she explained, “he must have caught his own knife on the vest before taking the victim out.”

Will hummed to himself, thinking.

Beverly shook her head to herself as she walked away. In later reflection, Will would realize she was amused by him losing himself in his mind. She wasn’t uncomfortable with how he seemed to drop out of the conversation. He had been right about being able to get along with her.

“Was this really necessary, Will?” Hannibal asked, mostly pretending to be upset about the fact that he was wearing jeans.

Will grinned at him. He still managed to look fantastic in a T-shirt. Will was almost jealous, except he was the one who got to take it off Hannibal later.

“Absolutely. Now, stop whining about it. It was my turn to pick dress code and location. It was my decision.”

Will took the car down the old back road, parking it and looking over at Hannibal.

“Alright, here we are,” he declared, “just past the treeline, and that’s it. Found this place when bud slipped out of his collar while we were taking a walk up this way. It’s perfect.”

Hannibal leaned over and kissed Will before they both got out of the car.

“If you say it is, then the universe will make it so,” he said.

Will rolled his eyes and let the dogs out of the back seat. They both circled him a few times before settling in next to his ankles as he walked. Hannibal had insisted on still preparing lunch for them both, and Will hadn’t had the heart to argue.

They entered the little clearing together and Hannibal spread out the blanket as Will threw a few sticks for the dogs. He couldn't stop grinning, and Will wished everything was this easy.

The dogs were kept off the blanket with a few words from Will and a few bribes from Hannibal. Will kept smiling, feeling the grass and the breeze, and smelling the earth and trees. It was all perfect.

"Does seeing me dressed this way honestly please you?" Hannibal asked, as if it was a ridiculous notion.

Will looked him over as if considering it before he tipped his head back and closed his eyes to just allow his other senses to take in everything.

"You still look like a damn dream, if that's what you're worried about," he said, "but I know you prefer to wear your suits. I could never ask you to give them up. I wouldn't enjoy it if you didn't. I figured the one time would be okay though."

Will felt Hannibal move up so they were pressed close together, and Hannibal's lips claimed his own. Will could feel Hannibal's appreciation and gratitude. It was like whiskey how he could get drunk on it. Everything Hannibal did, and every emotion he let Will feel from him was like another form of alcohol.

"As much as I enjoyed seeing you in your tuxedo," Hannibal said, brushing their noses together, "I would never ask you to exchange it for your usual attire. I wouldn't deign to change you in that way."

Will smiled.

"You're still pretentious."

"And you are still brash."

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this chapter was late. I took an impromptu vacation. I think next chapter is where things are going to get really serious.

Opportunity

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"I need you here," Jack said through the phone, "bring the kid too. I'll send you the address. It's not the same guy, but it might be bigger."

"Alright," Will said, standing up from his desk and waving Matthew over, "Do you think it's him?"

There was a moment of hesitation before Jack answered.

"Maybe."

Will hummed.

"If it's him, then I don't see why Matthew needs to come. It might not be a good idea to get another officer involved."

Jack just grunted.

"Just bring him. You can make him wait outside or canoodle with Price again if it bothers you. Partners are supposed to work together. Don't think I don't know that."

Will rolled his eyes as Matthew walked up beside him and they both waved to Sylvia on the way out of the department.

"Just send me the address and we'll be there," Will said, ending the call.

Jack might give him an earful for being rude, but he didn't care. If this really was the Ripper, then Will would only be able to think about the scene from here on out. He really didn't want Matthew to see it, but he couldn't justify why.

"Another scene?" Matthew asked as they slid into the car.

Will nodded, keeping his eyes on the road as he pulled up the address Jack had sent and started off towards it.

"Probably not like the others you've come along to. Jack says it's new. If it's really bad, I might ask you to stay outside. I need someone who doesn't have their head *full* of murder to talk to."

That was a partial lie. He did need someone like that, but Matthew was never going to be them. He had Hannibal. He could talk to Hannibal, and Hannibal was untainted by his work. No matter what Will told Hannibal about, or what they discussed, Hannibal was always clean. Nothing in the man changed when he was bombarded with the images of what Will's mind held.

Matthew was quiet for the rest of the drive. Will wondered why he wasn't trying to make conversation. He almost always had something to say, and nothing about what was happening should have changed that.

Will motioned for Matthew to wait outside as Jack greeted him. Jack briefed him quickly before letting Will get in by himself. Will was almost trembling with anticipation as he ventured further into the house.

None of the lights were on, save for one in the last room down the hall. It beckoned him like a siren's call, pulling him forward as he continued willingly.

Will felt himself separate into his two selves as he walked toward the light, identical movement between two realities. The Ripper and Will Graham walked in parallel tandem to the scene of the newest killing.

It was the Ripper. Will could feel it in the air before he even set eyes on the body. It was like the Ripper had left his voice in the vibrations of the house. Will's soul resonated with the lingering echoes of his presence, and responded in kind. There was no need for them to communicate aloud, or even visually at that point. There was simple, and pure understanding between them.

Will's breath almost left his lungs completely when he finally rounded the doorway and set his eyes on the scene.

It was for *him* .

The Ripper hadn't lost interest, and he hadn't left. He was giving Will another message. Will was desperate to know what he was saying.

The body hung, suspended by fishing line from the ceiling. He wore the black robe of a courtroom judge, and his eyes had been gouged out.

Perhaps gouged was too crude a word though. Will knew they had been taken with surgical accuracy and care. The hollow sockets were left on display, and deliberate drops of blood had left trails down his face like tears of a truly repentant sinner.

In one of the man's hands he held a red and white walking stick. The kind used by the blind. In the other hand was a dog's leash, though it had been torn and severed in the middle. The end that would have clipped to a dog's collar was not left at the scene.

Will's other self walked forward and admired the tableaux. His hands raised to feel and arrange the fabric of the robe. His fingers nimbly plucked at the strings holding the man up, as if they were the strings of a harp. They each hummed softly from his caresses and Will's other self smiled.

This was a gift. An invitation. Something meant for only one pair of eyes other than that of the creator. The creator knew others would look, but only one would see. All the others were insignificant. Only they for whom the scene was intended would understand, and it was all by his design.

Will blinked, trying to drag his mind back together. He found his vision doubled, and his hand moved up to touch the robe almost of its own accord.

Will started, falling back into himself once more. His hand dropped back to his side.

Will left the room. He found himself outside with Jack, not remembering walking back through the dark house. Matthew watched him as he always did, standing just behind Jack like some sort of overprotective friend.

“Well?” Jack asked.

Will shook his head to clear it.

“It’s him,” he confirmed, “and it’s for me again. I’m guessing this guy was really a judge. It’s the kind of detail the Ripper would care about.”

Jack waved over an agent who handed him a few papers.

“Yeah,” Jack said, reading over the top paper, “and it looks like he worked on cases for your department a few times. He probably sentenced a few of your criminals.”

Will nodded. That made sense. The Ripper wanted it to be personal, but he didn’t want to hurt Will. He wanted to make a point without making Will draw away from him. He would strike close to home, but only remove the infected flesh in order for the rest to heal.

“He’ll have organs missing, and I’ll need to know which. For now, I only have a foggy idea of what he means with this one.”

Jack raised his eyebrows and waited for Will to tell him what the foggy idea was. Will sighed and ran a hand over his face.

“Justice is blind, and I am the guide dog,” he said, “that’s the obvious bit. He already made the point that I’m just a pet in the larger scheme of things. I think he’s suggesting I turn on my master, and liberate myself from domestication. That’s all I can give you for now, and it’s still just a guess until I get more info.”

Jack huffed.

“Alright, Will. I know you’re not going to like this, but I’m going to start the gears moving to put you in a safe house. I can’t see this ending well for you, and I don’t need another dead officer on my hands.”

Will nodded. He had known Jack was close to making that call, and this was just what he needed to motivate him to do it. He wouldn’t listen to Will if he tried to explain why it was such a bad idea. Jack would have to learn the hard way. Unfortunately, that meant innocent lives would be lost in order to teach him.

“Let me put everything in order and tell chief,” Will requested, knowing Jack would let him do that at least, “then I’ll be back and you can give me a detail until everything is in motion.”

Jack nodded and waved him away.

Will and Matthew walked back to their car, and Will was planning what he would say to Hannibal. He knew Hannibal agreed with him when it came to this. Hannibal would understand that Will was in a bit of a tough spot though. He would know why Will had agreed.

Before Will had the chance to walk around the car to the driver's door, he was grabbed from behind and a cloth covered his mouth and nose. He recognized the smell of chloroform, registering it a heartbeat before the world went black.

Chapter End Notes

Alright, so I guess the next chapter is going to be more exciting than this one. I had to set everything in motion, so this is what we get his chapter.

Confusion

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will woke up with a pounding headache. He didn't remember drinking enough to give himself a hangover, and he groaned as he shifted against the seat he was laying on.

His hands were tied behind his back.

Will remembered the chloroform.

Will managed to sit up despite his pounding head and the fact that his wrists and ankles were both lashed together. He looked around himself, trying to figure out what had happened.

He was in the backseat of a car, and it was dark outside. He managed to move his hands along the door behind his back to look for the handle.

There wasn't a handle. He was in a police car.

Will felt the knot holding his wrists, and smiled.

If Matthew was the one who had done this, he was glad he had never mentioned he was a fisherman.

He thought the only person who *could* have done this was his young partner. His head was still a bit foggy and throbbing, but he knew Matthew was the most likely person to have done this. There hadn't been anyone else around, and Matthew had just heard that Will was going to be put in a safe house.

As Will worked the knot loose, he went over everything he could remember.

He had known Matthew was borderline obsessed with him, but he hadn't expected him to be on the verge of abduction. It would make *more* sense if Matthew was actually the killer they had been looking for. The one who removed the hands. Now, *that* would make sense. Matthew fit the profile. Will just hadn't expected him to care so much about justice. He didn't seem a very passionate officer. Will had known plenty of officers who seemed a lot more likely to become a vigilante than Matthew.

He must have had another motive.

Will's hands were free, and he rubbed the rope burns to relieve the pain. Then he got to work on his ankles. His gun wasn't in his holster, but he hadn't expected it to be.

Matthew had used a simple knot, and Will kept thanking himself for having been a private person and not telling his young partner that he was a fisherman. He did wonder why Matthew hadn't used one of their pairs of handcuffs rather than some rope. He might have time to ask the kid later.

Once Will's limbs were free, his next goal was to get out of the car.

Being in the backseat of a police car was a bit of a problem. He was separated from the front seats by steel mesh, bulletproof glass, and metal plating. There were no door handles and no way to unlock or open the doors from the inside. The door windows were reinforced with steel mesh as well, but they were Will's only real hope of escape.

Will had seen a gangster kick out a window once. The man had been angry, and larger than Will. The difference between these windows and the glass shielding the front seats was that these were not bulletproof glass. They were the weakest part of the car.

Will ran his hands over the glass of the windows, looking for any small flaws or chips. He hoped to find something to help his attempt to break out.

Ah. He found a small crack from where one of his recent arrests had tried to use their elbow to bash through. They hadn't made much headway, and had shattered a bone in their arm, but they had given Will a glimmer of hope.

Will made a few calculations as he laid down on the seat. He would need to aim correctly, and he would need to avoid harming himself in the attempt. He had seen enough hyper extended legs from people trying to kick doors in, and he couldn't afford to let that happen to him right now.

Will steeled himself, taking three deep breaths before he kicked the window with both feet as hard as he could.

Pain shot up his leg and the window held, though he heard a slight crack. It hadn't come from his leg, so he felt a flicker of hope.

He grit his teeth against the pain and took two more breaths before he tried again.

The window broke into large pieces that fell with a clatter around his ankles and out of the car.

A rush of cool night air flowed in and Will was able to take stock of where he was. He moved over to stick his head out of the window, and he looked around. The car was parked on a street, under a tree. Will reached out and opened the door. He was glad it wasn't locked, so he didn't have to climb through the window. He would definitely have gotten several lacerations, and he didn't really want to deal with that.

Will stepped out into the night, and took stock of his legs. They hurt, but he knew he hadn't broken anything. He probably just had shin splints.

Will walked along the street a bit, coming out from under the tree and trying to find anything to let him know where he was.

Will stopped, blinking up at the building he had come to. He thought he must be dreaming. There was no way this was where Matthew had left him. There wasn't any reason for him to be here.

It was Hannibal's house.

Something was wrong, though. The lights were off, and the door was slightly ajar. It wouldn't be noticeable if someone drove by, but Will was familiar enough with how the house looked that it seemed to stare him in the face.

Will reached for his gun instinctively, feeling hollow and defenseless when he remembered it wasn't there.

Will walked into Hannibal's house, on the balls of his feet to keep his footsteps soft. He knew something was wrong, and all his training kicked in. He scanned the foyer, making his way slowly towards the kitchen. He needed to arm himself, and he knew exactly where Hannibal kept the knives.

The kitchen was in mild disarray, which spoke volumes to Will. Someone must have caught Hannibal while he was cooking, and had subdued him. Why, and what they planned to do to him, Will didn't know. For once in his life, he thought he would have followed the habit of the other officers.

Shoot first, ask questions later.

As it was, Will didn't have a gun, so shooting wasn't an option.

Will took the biggest knife he could find and tried to figure out where someone might have gone with Hannibal as a hostage.

Will decided to search the ground floor first, and then see if he had managed to bring Hannibal upstairs. Taking an unwilling hostage up a staircase would be difficult, so Will didn't think it would be very likely.

Will searched through every room, keeping as quiet as he could and listening for any movement.

When Will circled back to the kitchen, he heard a sound. It was a thump, but it didn't sound like it had come from upstairs. An almost absurd thought came to him, then.

A house this big *had* to have a basement. He had never seen one without the other. Big houses always had basements. He had never seen Hannibal's basement.

Where would Hannibal hide a door to a basement?

Will stared at the pantry door, feeling something akin to dread seep into his veins.

Will walked over and opened the pantry. He had made fun of Hannibal once for having such a large area dedicated only to food. In truth, he loved Hannibal's cooking, and he loved how much Hannibal loved to cook.

On the floor, Will could see a handle for a hatch. The door was well hidden, and Will would have admired the craftsmanship if the situation were different.

Will was apprehensive as he lifted the door, but the hinges didn’t make a sound. He should have known better. Hannibal took very good care of everything he owned.

There was a light somewhere below, and Will could see the outline of a staircase down towards it. He tested the weight of the knife in his hand before he started down.

Chapter End Notes

No dialogue, but I wanted to give this sequence as much development as it deserved. I hope I didn't overdo it. I have done that before.

Honestly, I have been seriously neglecting my other fics to write what is happening in this one. It's just so exciting. I hope you all like it.

Answers

Chapter Summary

Everyone gets some answers! Yay!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"What did you do to Will?"

Matthew's voice reached Will from around a corner. Will wasn't sure what he was seeing, surrounded by a sterile, almost hospital-like operating room. Hannibal had never told him about the basement, but Will knew he would have some sort of explanation for what everything meant.

"I haven't done anything to Will."

It was Hannibal's voice. Will almost sighed in relief. Hannibal was alive. He sounded out of breath, but he was alive. There was still hope. Will hadn't even realized he had been afraid Hannibal was dead until he knew he wasn't.

"Come on," Matthew said, "The great bloodhound can't see the serial killer right under his nose? You have to have done something to make him blind. He's smarter than you. He would *know* ."

There was a cough, which might have been Hannibal laughing.

"The only thing blinding Will is his own emotions," Hannibal coughed out, "and if he is smarter than me, why do you think he is not smarter than you? He didn't see *you* ."

There was a bang, like something being dropped on a metal table, and Will almost jumped. He prayed Hannibal was okay. The fact that he was able to talk, and was smart talking Matthew, gave him hope.

"I am his *partner* !" Matthew shouted, "and I know him. I know how he thinks. He trusts me. He talks to *me* . His head is clear. He doesn't get blinded by his emotions."

There was another cough, and Will wasn't sure what he could do. For all he knew, Matthew had two guns, and probably more weapons that he didn't know about. He had to think quickly, and he had to do it right. If he made a mistake, Hannibal could die.

That thought gave Will another rush of adrenaline, and he turned around the corner.

Matthew had his back to Will, which gave him an advantage. They were both facing Hannibal, who was handcuffed. Hannibal's arms were suspended above him with the cuffs by a large meat hook that was hanging from the ceiling. Hannibal was dressed as if he had been expecting a quiet night in, wearing just a vest and shirt with slacks. His sleeves were rolled up, and Will realized he *must* have been cooking.

The only time Will had ever been able to sneak up on Hannibal had been when he was cooking. The sounds and smells of his activity had masked Will's approach, and Will had managed to wrap himself around Hannibal from behind while he was at the stove.

Something Will had been amused by was exactly what had put Hannibal in danger.

Hannibal saw Will, and his lips twitched, almost like a smile. He didn't keep his eyes on Will, probably to keep Matthew from realizing he was there.

"Will may *speak* to you," Hannibal said to Matthew, his voice strained a bit because his arms were pulled so high, "but he does not tell you everything. You do not know how he thinks."

Matthew picked up a knife, and Will could see he didn't have either gun on him. They were discarded on a table on the other side of the room. Will walked forward quickly, still keeping quiet.

He was just outside of arm's reach when he saw Matthew step towards Hannibal with the knife.

"Matthew!" Will snapped, panicking and blowing his own cover.

Matthew spun around, holding the knife out towards him. He stopped, and his eyes lit up.

"Graham, sir," he said, "how did you get out of the car?"

Will held his knife close to himself, extended just enough that he might be able to block if Matthew attacked him.

"I've seen guys break through the back windows before," he explained, "it's the one weak spot on our cars. Now you answer my question. Why did you abduct me, and attack Doctor Lecter?"

Matthew tipped his head, almost in the same way birds did when they were looking at something new.

"I didn't really have a choice now, did I?" he said, seeming to be getting more agitated, "They were going to put you away. I *had* to keep you out of a safe house. I *had* to let you see my masterpiece. I hadn't finished yet. I know you are going to love it."

Will kept his breathing even and his eyes flicked back to Hannibal, who was watching them with hooded eyes.

"You're the one who has been cutting off the hands," Will said. He knew he had to sound sure and confident in the moment. Even if he wasn't sure, any sign of weakness could set

Matthew off. “So why did you attack Doctor Lecter? He’s not a criminal.”

Matthew laughed, dropping the knife an inch lower.

“You really *don’t* get it. Hannibal Lecter is the Chesapeake Ripper. He has been playing you for a fool all this time. I was just curious about him at first. I followed him twice after you started spending so much time with him. I followed him out to a place that was about to be a crime scene. I watched him kill another man, and he set it all up in a display. He’s a chameleon, Mr. Graham. He deserves to die more than any of those thieves I killed for you.”

Will frowned.

“No. You’re wrong,” he said, not sure what Matthew was saying, “You’re the killer here. You need to stop. Doctor Lecter hasn’t done anything to you.”

Matthew dropped his head, laughing softly.

“Didn’t he?”

Will interrupted Matthew by taking the chance he saw. He lunged forward and plunged the knife into Matthew’s shoulder.

Matthew screamed and dropped his own knife. He staggered towards Hannibal, grabbing at the man’s clothes.

Will’s vision went red and he grabbed Matthew’s ankle. He pulled hard, making Matthew fall hard onto the ground and away from where Hannibal still hung. Matthew gasped, having had the breath knocked out of him, as he reached out for something, anything to grab.

Will stepped on Matthew’s wrist, pressing until he heard a crunch. Matthew screamed again. Will didn’t feel anything akin to regret or sorrow as he broke Matthew’s wrist. He deserved it.

Will squatted down next to Matthew’s ribs and stared him in the eye.

“Lucky for me, if you’re right about Doctor Lecter, he will have the entire basement soundproofed. And he’ll know how to get rid of a body. I don’t plan to make you easy to clean up.”

Matthew’s eyes grew wide, and his breathing continued to struggle as he slowly realized that he was in very *real* danger from someone he had idolized. He tried again to move, but Will raised the knife to his throat and cut it. He made sure not to sever the arteries, but cut through the trachea. He wanted Matthew to choke on his own blood. It would be worse than bleeding out.

As Matthew choked and gurgled on the floor, Will picked the keys off the table and unlocked Hannibal’s handcuffs. Hannibal sighed heavily as he lowered his arms. Will felt tears prick his eyes when he saw the deep red marks on Hannibal’s wrists. They were bleeding sluggishly, and Will took Hannibal’s hands in his to inspect the injuries.

“You’re hands,” he said quietly, feeling the words catch in his throat. He loved Hannibal’s hands.

Hannibal put a hand under Will’s chin and lifted his head to look in his eyes.

“They will heal quickly,” Hannibal assured him, “and they will take care of you as well as ever. We have other things to worry about at the moment.”

Matthew had stopped moving or gasping for air, and Will looked back over at his body.

“Oh god,” Will said, stepping back away from Hannibal, “Oh god oh god oh god. He said you’re a killer. You have a surgery basement. I just *killed* someone. I have never killed anyone before. I always shoot at the legs. He was going to kill you.”

Hannibal grabbed Will’s shoulders, and looked him in the eye.

Will couldn’t focus. He couldn’t think. He felt his breathing speed up, and his heart was beating too fast. He felt tired, but he thought he must be in some sort of danger. He didn’t know what was happening anymore. He reached out and clung to Hannibal, the maroon eyes acting as his only anchor to reality.

Hannibal ran his hands over Wills arms to reassure him, moving them both over to one of the tables.

“Will I need you to try to calm down,” Hannibal said, his voice swimming through Will’s ears, “I’m going to give you something to help.”

Will nodded.

Hannibal. Hannibal was here. Hannibal was safe. Will was safe with Hannibal. Will trusted Hannibal.

There was a slight prick on his arm, and Will smiled.

The world went black again, and Will felt his body supported by a pair of strong arms.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was almost late, due to my old laptop giving up the ghost. Rest in peace, Charlemagne.

My new laptop is doing pretty good so far. Thank goodness for Carmilla.

I hope you all liked this chapter. I've got more where that came from.

Horror

Will felt warm and comfortable. Everything was soft, and he felt safe and protected.

Will turned his head, and a beam of light played over his eyelids. He furrowed his brow and frowned. His mouth was dry and he smacked his tongue, clearing his throat and trying to open his eyes.

There shouldn't be light shining on his bed. He never opened the curtains.

A steady hand found Will's forehead, and turned his head back away from the light. Will sighed in relief now that the light wasn't irritating his eyes, but he still couldn't open them.

There was a shushing sound and the hand moved to Will's cheek. There was a familiar smell, and Will breathed it in. It made him smile.

"Dear, precious, clever Will," a smooth, accented voice said, "you have no idea what you do to me."

Will hummed. His dry mouth was beginning to bother him, so he clicked his tongue again. He wasn't sure what was going on, but he felt safe and cared for. There was a soft, amused huff and the hand moved away from Will's face. Will frowned at the loss, but listened to the other person moving around the room.

There were soft sounds of objects bumping against each other, and then the presence returned to his side.

"Will," The voice said, "I know you are having trouble opening your eyes. You are going to have a hard time moving as well. I'm going to sit you up so I can help you get a drink of water. Hum if you understand."

Will smiled and hummed in agreement. There was another huff of laughter as a pair of strong hands hooked under his arms and lifted. Will was pulled forward until he was slumped against a firm, warm, comfortable surface. The surface moved and shifted, pulsing up and down under Will's forehead in time with puffs of air against his neck.

"Alright, Will. I've put the pillows up for you. I'm going to move you back against them so you can sit up in the bed."

Will hummed again and the other person lifted him slightly. They moved him back until Will was sitting up against a pile of pillows.

A hand cupped behind Will's head and lifted it up as a cup was pressed to his lips. He drank the water slowly. The hand in his hair moved gently, stroking the back of his head in a comforting motion.

Hannibal.

The name echoed in Will's head, triggered by the familiar sensation.

The cup was taken from Will's lips and he wet them with his tongue. His eyelids still felt heavy, but they were starting to lift up. He just needed more time.

"Haa-annibal," Will managed to slur, wanting to let Hannibal know he was there, and he knew it was him.

There was another shushing sound, and Hannibal's other hand cupped under Will's chin. He brushed his thumb over Will's lips and hummed.

"You are very tired, Will," Hannibal said, sounding pleased, "you shouldn't try to speak just yet. Save your energy so you may open your eyes in a moment. You are truly brilliant, dear Will."

A pair of lips pressed to Will's forehead, and then the touches left. Will's head was laid back on the pillows, and the hands left. Will frowned at the loss of contact, and the mattress under him shifted as Hannibal stood up and walked away.

Will decided he should try to remember what had happened while he was unable to open his eyes or talk.

He remembered going to a crime scene. It was beautiful. It was for him. The Ripper had given him another scene, and it had made him feel wonderful. He had told Jack what he could tell from it. Jack was going to put him in a safe house.

Was this the safe house? He would be glad if Hannibal was there with him in the safe house.

Wait. No. He had woken up in the back of his patrol car. He had escaped. It had been Matthew. Matthew had abducted him. He had found them. Matthew and Hannibal had been in the basement.

Hannibal had a basement?

Oh wait. Yes. Hannibal had a basement. They had been in the basement. Matthew had attacked Hannibal. He had said Hannibal was the Chesapeake Ripper. Hannibal had a very clean, sterile basement.

Will opened his eyes and found himself in an unfamiliar room. It wasn't his apartment, and it wasn't anywhere in Hannibal's house. Hannibal wasn't in the room anymore. It was dark, but there was a dim lamp in the corner and some, either early morning or late evening, rays of sun streaming in through the window. The glass of water had been left on the bedside table, and Will saw that he was hooked up to an IV. He wasn't sure why Hannibal would find that necessary. Aside from the bandages on his wrists where he had been burned from the ropes, he didn't seem to have any other injuries.

Will cleared his throat again, and felt like he had enough energy to try speaking again.

"Hannibal!"

Will heard some sort of activity stop in another room, and Hannibal was in the doorway with a smile on his face.

“Hello, Will. How are you feeling?”

Will frowned.

“What’s the IV for?” he asked.

Hannibal raised an eyebrow and walked over to sit beside the bed.

“I had to be sure you would wake slowly so you would not hurt yourself. Are you still feeling very lethargic?”

Will looked at Hannibal, wanting to reach out, but neither having the energy for it nor wanting to give into the desire. He wasn’t sure of anything yet.

“I don’t think I could lift my hand if I tried,” Will replied, “what about your basement? What was all that stuff for?”

Hannibal smiled, watching Will for a moment before he moved around the bed and adjusted something on the IV. Will wished he wouldn’t. He didn’t want to have anything in his system. He wanted Hannibal to just be honest with him like he had always been.

“I thought Matthew Brown made that very clear,” Hannibal said calmly, “I had planned to tell you. Your unfortunate partner was quite the catalyst. He forced my hand, in a way. I had hoped not to act in this way for quite some time. I am still pleased with the outcome of events. I am more pleased with how you contributed than I expected to be.”

Will swallowed hard.

“You are *pleased* that I killed Matthew,” he spat weakly.

Hannibal smiled.

“I *had* planned to do it myself,” Hannibal said, moving back to his seat, “but it was much more enjoyable to watch you enact your own justice. You were radiant.”

Will closed his eyes, not wanting to look Hannibal in the eye. Everything was so damn wrong.

“So,” Will said, trying not to choke on the words too much, “This entire time, you were the killer I was hunting.”

Hannibal put his hand into Will’s. Will opened his eyes and looked at him despite what he knew he should do.

“Will. I have had the privilege of seeing you come to know every aspect of myself. You did not know it was me, but I have been so blessed to be witness to your growth, and your

becoming. I only regret I could not have told you sooner. I had to be sure you loved all of me. I love all of *you* , Will Graham."

Will closed his eyes again, but it was too late. The image of Hannibal, holding his hand and looking at him with the most intense adoration, was burned into his mind. He felt his chest ache, and he wanted to forgive Hannibal for everything and just kiss him and have everything be okay again.

"What did you do with Matthew's body?"

Hannibal was silent for a moment before he answered.

"I had a design prepared for him. I admit to taking a small amount of your blood for the revision of my plan. I had to make your disappearance easily explained."

Hannibal actually sounded like he was sorry, and it was breaking Will's heart. He should have been furious. He should have been horrified. He should have wanted to never talk to Hannibal again.

Maybe Hannibal was giving him something through the IV that made him feel so calm. Despite all his logic and morals, Will still loved Hannibal.

"Get out."

It was all Will could do to retain his conscience, even the little bit he felt he still had.

Hannibal was silent for a moment. He walked back around the bed to where the IV was, and Will knew he was adjusting it again. He patted Will gently on the shoulder before he left the room.

Hannibal didn't close the door behind himself, and Will knew he wanted to keep tabs on him at all times.

With Hannibal no longer in the room, Will opened his eyes and allowed himself to fully comprehend what had happened.

Tears flowed over his cheeks and down his face.

Will had killed a man. He had killed his *partner*, and he had been nearly *living* with the most prolific serial killer of the time. He had been abducted twice, and was now completely helpless to escape because the killer, and *his stupid boyfriend*, was a very good doctor.

Will felt the medication take hold and he slipped under.

Nightmare

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"You have been crying in your sleep, Will," Hannibal said, wiping Will's face with a wet cloth, "I am distressed to see you so unhappy."

Hannibal genuinely sounded upset, and Will hated it. He hated that a serial killer, someone who had repeatedly chosen cruelty over mercy, was so loving and caring towards him.

"I would be very pleased if you could eat something solid," he continued, once again propping Will up into a sitting position.

Will hated the feeling of the medications in his blood. He wanted to yank the needle out of his arm and be free of it. He never wanted to see another doctor for the rest of his life.

"Well, I guess since I can talk, I should be able to chew," Will said sourly, "but I don't expect you are going to give me the use of my hands. At least not today."

Hannibal smiled sadly and nodded.

"Not just yet, Will. I promise you will be allowed to get up very soon. For now, I want you to bear with me and endure my pretentiousness."

Will huffed unhappily.

"I've put up with it for this long already," he grumbled.

Hannibal huffed a quiet laugh.

"Just so."

Hannibal sat down next to Will and set a plate down on the table. Will could smell it, and of course it smelled amazing. He thought it was an omelette, but he couldn't be sure. He wasn't sure he could be sure of anything anymore.

Hannibal carefully cut a piece off and lifted the fork to Will's lips. Will accepted it and chewed it carefully. It sure did taste like an omelette. The egg was perfect, of course. Will swallowed in silence and accepted the next bite from Hannibal.

Once he was more than half way done with the food, Will decided he deserved some more answers.

"Where are we?" he asked.

Hannibal nodded and put the fork down.

“This is a house that I own, near the ocean. I thought you might enjoy the view once you are able to walk around and see it. There is no way to trace it back to me, so we needn’t worry about Agent Crawford or any of your other acquaintances. We are quite hidden here.”

Will scoffed. Despite himself, he did feel some relief to know Jack wouldn’t be showing up to put Hannibal in jail.

“So you have me all to yourself,” he said, “I’m just your *pet* policeman. Just another *toy* for you to bat around until I break. Then you move on, go to Europe and start over with a new victim pool and a new *interesting detective*.”

Hannibal frowned.

“Will, if you believe anything I have ever said, I want you to believe this. You are entirely unique to me, and I will never find someone like you again, nor have I before. I don’t intend to let you go anytime soon. You are mine, for the rest of time.”

Will felt his stomach turn over and he thought he might be sick. He wasn’t sure why.

“I don’t know what you expect me to do now,” Will said softly, afraid of what the answer might be.

Hannibal raised his hands to Will’s face and placed them on his cheeks. It was a familiar touch, and one that hurt with how much Will wanted it.

“I expect you to be yourself,” Hannibal answered, “And I want you to stay with me. I have never been able to predict you, Will Graham, and I don’t expect that to change. I just hope you can endure me.”

Will looked away from Hannibal. He didn’t know how he should feel.

That was a lie. He knew exactly how he *should* feel. The problem was he didn’t feel that way. There had to be something wrong with him, but the only psychiatrist he had ever liked was the source of his problems now.

“‘Till death do us part?” he whispered, afraid of himself at that point.

Hannibal kissed him, and Will ached. He closed his eyes against the world, and wasn’t sure what he could do anymore. He had never been more powerless.

Will woke, feeling the familiar disorientation that came with a not quite natural sleep. He had been getting used to it over the last week. He woke up, he assumed every day, feeling lost. Hannibal would bring him back to the world, and Will would try his best to force Hannibal away.

Hannibal was in the bed with him.

They weren't lying next to each other, as Will would have expected. Hannibal was sitting up in the bed with Will cradled in his embrace. Will had always felt safe and comfortable in this position. It resonated differently when he couldn't move his limbs of his own volition.

Hannibal was talking. He was saying something in a language Will recognized, but didn't know.

Lithuanian. Hannibal had told him stories in the language before, when he would wake up in a cold sweat and cling to the other man like a lifeline. It had always lulled him back to sleep, where he wouldn't fear the darkness anymore.

Will hummed softly, letting Hannibal know he was awake.

Hannibal stopped his quiet murmurings and pressed a kiss to Will's temple.

"Good morning, dearest," he said, "I hope you slept well. You did not cry in your sleep, so I imagine your dreams were pleasant."

Will considered that.

His dreams had been filled with images of Hannibal. They had been happy, and everything had been good. Hannibal had cooked, and Will had snuck bits of food from every dish he finished. Hannibal had grinned and shaken his head with a quiet laugh. Everything had been alright again.

Reality was cruel, and reminded Will that it had just been a dream. Just like life had been for the last long while after he had met Hannibal. He couldn't trust himself, or his perception of reality.

Will hummed again, though it was noncommittal. He would have to decide later if the dreams could be considered pleasant.

Hannibal echoed the sound, shifting slightly under Will. He had one arm wrapped around Will's chest, and his other hand was up stroking through Will's hair. His head was bowed low so his nose brushed against Will's neck and jaw.

After a few minutes, Will managed to open his eyes. He looked down at the two pairs of legs on the bed. He was no longer under a blanket, but the room's temperature was agreeable. He knew Hannibal had been keeping it exactly perfect, as particular as the man was.

Hannibal was wearing a pair of pajama pants that matched the ones Will had woken up in. The arm that was wrapped around Will's torso was clad in the red sweater that Will had repeatedly told Hannibal he was a particular fan of.

"I think we will take a walk today," Hannibal said, "I am sure you will enjoy the view from the bluff. Since I met you I thought of bringing you here and walking with you over the ocean."

Will swallowed, feeling his throat click.

Hannibal removed his hand from Will's hair and retrieved a glass of water from the bedside table. He raised it to Will's lips, and Will drank from it slowly. The last thing he needed was to get into a coughing fit while he didn't have the energy to raise his own arm.

"I get to leave the IV behind for a bit?" he asked, giving the said apparatus a death glare.

Hannibal hummed in amusement.

"Your wit never ceases to entertain me," he said, "And I think I can allow you that. I would very much like to show you something first."

Hannibal shifted once more, and Will had no idea what he might be reaching for. He was surprised when Hannibal pulled an iPad in front of them and opened it.

"As much disdain as I feel for Miss Lounds, I have always been able to rely on her for the most optimal coverage of my work."

Will swallowed hard, knowing now what Hannibal was going to show him. He wasn't sure he wanted to see, but at the same time he knew he had been *desperate* to see.

Hannibal opened the device and pulled up one of Tattlecrimes' articles.

The picture was what Hannibal really wanted Will to see. Will still didn't know how Freddie managed to get into the scenes and take pictures without being caught or reprimanded. Jack would have his hands full with her for the rest of his career unless something was done about her soon.

The image showed Matthew's body. His hands had been severed, and the wrist Will had broken was a mangled mess. Hannibal hadn't done Matthew any favors. Matthew's head was tipped back to show off the cut Will had made on his neck, making him stare up at the ceiling of the opera house. Will wasn't sure, but he thought he was in the same place Hannibal and he had been standing when the picture Freddie had used had been taken. Matthew's bowels were out, spilled onto the floor and he was kneeling as if in prayer.

Will felt his heart flutter in his chest, and he knew Hannibal would feel it too. He took a deep breath and closed his eyes against the image.

"Tell me what you see?" Hannibal asked, his voice soft against Will's ear.

Will managed to lift his hand, grabbing Hannibal's arm weakly, feeling the soft fabric of the sweater he loved so much.

"You punished him. The same way he punished those criminals, but more. Your motivation was different. He wasn't just street trash. He had rebelled against your will, and you are a god when compared to him. He was a coward, and worthless. His one redeeming act would be to pray for exaltation, which you gave him by allowing his body to become a masterpiece. You are proud of the work I did, and so did not hide or alter it. You are displaying and gloating. Don't you think the placement of the body might raise some suspicion to you?"

Will could feel Hannibal's heart beating against his spine, and it was comforting despite himself. There wasn't much he could do to combat the reactions Hannibal had been fostering in him for so long. Especially while he was still having his system flooded with whatever drugs.

"Jack has already spoken with me," Hannibal said, "I am *very* concerned for your well-being, and have been asking him to keep me informed about any developments in the case. He believes he acted too slowly in putting you into a safe location. Freddie Lounds is being questioned about the pictures. It seems the location did not cause anyone to think I was involved."

Will sighed. He should have expected as much. Suspicion rolled off Hannibal like water off a duck's back. He was too good.

Chapter End Notes

I hope everyone had a good Beat Racists With a Bat day. No one admitted to being a racist while I was carrying mine, funnily enough.

I hope you all enjoy this chapter. <3

Reality

Chapter Summary

Reality can be harsh sometimes.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"So," Will said as Hannibal helped him ease down onto a bench overlooking the bluff, "You're the Chesapeake Ripper?"

Hannibal sat beside him, and Will resented how weak he felt. He had no choice but to lean on Hannibal as they sat. He wanted to resent the fact that the view was amazing, but he decided it wasn't *exactly* Hannibal's fault.

Hannibal was amused by the question, and Will decided he *was* allowed to resent that.

"I thought you had an opinion about that name for me," Hannibal reminded, "You would prefer I be called Peryton."

The image of the creature flashed before Will's eyes, scuffing it's hooves on the cobblestones as it ruffled its feathers.

"I don't trust myself to decide what to call you," Will said numbly, feeling as if the bluff might crumble right out from under them.

It would be an appropriate end to them both, he supposed. It would be easier that way. He wouldn't have to make a decision, and Hannibal wouldn't be left to wreak havoc in the world. Will almost wished it would happen, and just end it all for them.

"I wouldn't trust anyone else," Hannibal said in response, "You are the only one who has been able to not only understand my actions, but discover and know my origins. Your opinion is the only educated one when it comes to myself."

Will huffed, staring at the horizon. He could hear the waves beat against the cliff below, and he could smell the salt in the air. It had always been calming to him to be near the ocean. That was probably why Hannibal had chosen this place. He had wanted to have Will be at ease. A prisoner at ease was easier to keep.

"I don't know anything about you," Will mumbled bitterly, "I thought I was getting close, but in reality you were just leading me in circles."

Hannibal pressed a kiss to Will's temple.

“I never led you anywhere but closer to the truth. You wanted to know me, and I wished for nothing more. I always led you toward the next part of me. Your nature called to mine, and my nature replied. The same sin binds us.”

Will scoffed.

“Quoting Oscar Wilde, now? How subtle of you. In case you hadn’t noticed, I’m not a murderer.”

Hannibal hummed, nuzzling the hair behind Will’s ear as if the conversation was as normal and casual as could be.

“Are you forgetting someone?” he whispered.

Matthew. The images flashed back to Will’s mind and he took a sharp breath, closing his eyes as if to fight back against the memory.

“That was self defense,” he defended.

There was a pause, wherein both Will and Hannibal considered the fact that he had just outright lied. They both knew better. They had both been there, both heard what he had said. They both knew he was lying to them both.

Hannibal hummed again.

“Once he was on the ground, and there was a pair of handcuffs on the table next to you, it was no longer self defense. Breaking his wrist might have been forgiven, though I saw the pleasure in your eyes as you slowly applied more pressure. After that, he was entirely incapacitated. You even discussed disposing of his body before you cut his throat. You made sure he would suffocate, rather than bleed. You may be able to lie to Jack, your chief, and yourself, but you have never been able to lie to me.”

Hannibal tried to soften the words by pressing another kiss to Will’s temple, but Will couldn’t stand it.

Will pulled away from Hannibal and his stomach emptied onto the cobblestones next to the bench. He considered that maybe he should have soiled Hannibal’s clothes out of spite, but he had instinctively leaned away. Too bad. Maybe next time.

Hannibal rubbed soothing circles into Will’s back until Will spat out the last bit of bile and sat back up. Will was trembling from the exertion, and he reluctantly fell against Hannibal’s firm torso.

“You bastard,” Will said.

Hannibal pressed a smile into Will’s hair, continuing to caress him soothingly.

“I know you will resent me for some time,” Hannibal said softly, “and it will be for the fact that I reflect the truth of your nature back to you. I know you can come to understand that the mirrors in your mind can reflect the best of yourself, and not just the worst of others. You

must accept the fact that the parts of you that you have always feared, are the best parts of you. They will only aid you in your life."

Will closed his eyes, wishing Hannibal would just give him a break. He just listened to the waves below, and tried to breathe. After a few moments of silence, Will decided to address something he had been thinking about.

"You have to kill again in order to finish the sounder," Will said, "since you claimed Matthew. You need one more body."

Hannibal hummed in consideration, shifting slightly beneath Will's weight.

"I suppose to," Hannibal agreed.

Will knew he was purposefully not answering the implied question. Hannibal had always wanted Will to be upfront about what he wanted. He guessed Hannibal hadn't changed in that respect.

"Who do you have in mind?"

Will could feel Hannibal smiling behind him, and he almost regretted bringing it up. Hannibal would use this line of conversation to further his own agenda. Will knew he would. He just had to know what was going on.

"I had considered our friend, Jack Crawford," Hannibal mused aloud, "he has never been particularly polite to you, and I have been thinking of it since he hesitated to believe you concerning my gift to you. However, I would be open to any requests."

Will swallowed.

Jack. Hannibal wanted to kill Jack. Memories flashed behind Will's eyelids, and he saw everything that had happened between them.

"No," he said, as firmly as he could manage, "Not Jack."

Hannibal huffed slightly, and Will wasn't sure if he was amused or annoyed.

"Any particular reason?" Hannibal asked, "I know you were not particularly fond of him."

Will counted out a few breaths.

"He's married," he replied softly, remembering the gold band Jack always had on his hand, "and people will miss him. He does good in the world. People need him. If nothing else, don't leave his wife all alone."

Will could feel Hannibal softening at his words, and he allowed himself to be relieved. Hannibal would have a soft spot for people in love, now. Now that he considered himself to be in love.

“Very well,” Hannibal said, sounding amused, “but as you said, I shall have to choose someone. Do you have a replacement in mind?”

Will swallowed. He should have known Hannibal would turn it back to that. He wanted *Will* to choose. He wanted it to be on Will’s conscience when he killed again.

“Can you give me some time to think about it?” he asked, feeling his voice shake, “maybe tell me who else you had in mind. I know you had more than one option.”

Will opened his eyes and looked up at Hannibal, trying to gauge his reaction. Hannibal looked down at him with heartbreaking love in his eyes, and he pressed a kiss to Will’s forehead.

“Of course, darling. Take your time to consider it. Life is precious,” Hannibal said. The words almost sounded absurd, coming from him. “I had also considered Franklyn, whom I know neither of us are particularly fond of. It would certainly be a risk, but perhaps I could use his death as an excuse to take some time off from my practice. I could spend more time here taking care of you.”

Will pressed his lips together. He thought of Franklyn, overly friendly and with no concept of privacy. Grinning at him no matter the circumstances. Patting the dogs on the head even though he wasn’t an animal person. Trying again and again to invite Will out for drinks or other things. Franklyn, who had unwittingly told Freddie all about Will and his personal life. Franklyn who had, in hindsight, also told Matthew what he needed to know in order to pull everything off. Franklyn, who had almost made a fool of Will at the opera.

“You mean you haven’t already taken time off to be here this long?” Will asked, deflecting obviously, “and here I thought you had dropped your old life in order to keep me.”

Hannibal huffed a quiet laugh.

“I admit, it is a constant temptation,” he said, “and I have been slowly referring my patients to other psychiatrists for some time, knowing this was a possible eventuality. I have much more free time now than I did when we first met.”

Will had wondered about that. Hannibal had everything prepared for Will to be here, and Will had known it had been something Hannibal had planned, at least in part. Finding out that he had also been covering his absence so far back wasn’t that much of a surprise.

“Well, aren’t I special,” Will said bitterly.

Hannibal hummed softly.

“Aren’t you just.”

Chapter End Notes

I finally have the end of this written out. I was beginning to wonder if it would ever end, or if I would just end up writing years of their happily married life into eternity. Luckily for me, I found a nice place to end it. Just four more chapters to go, people.

Seeing Things

Chapter Summary

> Trigger Warning!!! Mentions of suicidal thoughts. Nothing comes of it, really. I just thought you ought to know.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will was sitting up to a counter, feeling familiar in that position. It reminded him of Hannibal's other house. He would sit at the counter and watch him cook, just like this.

But that had been a simpler time.

Hannibal had given Will the iPad, so he could read what Freddie had been saying about him since his disappearance. Will had seen the hesitation in Hannibal's face when he had asked, but eventually Hannibal had given in. The condition was that Will not leave his sight with the device. That meant Will was in the kitchen as Hannibal prepared food that would be saved for when he had to leave Will in the house alone.

Will hadn't planned to try anything. Honestly, he didn't see any escape anymore. Even if he managed to contact Jack, Hannibal was already in his head, so deep he would never be free of him again. Even if the FBI managed to storm the place and take Hannibal, he would still be there, whispering in Will's head. If they killed Hannibal... Will would kill himself. He knew he would. It might not be on purpose, or meditated beforehand. Will just knew he was too far gone to have Hannibal torn away from him.

Freddie had been very busy.

She had covered the scene Hannibal had left with Matthew's body, calling it an obvious jab at the authorities. Apparently, Hannibal had used the blood he had taken from Will to plant a crime scene. He had used the police car, and made it clear that Matthew had abducted Will. There was blood in the back seat, and on the glass so it looked like Will had cut himself badly when he had broken the window.

Then, there was Matthew's apartment.

Will's blood was on several knives, several sets of clothes, and all over the floor. It looked like an absolutely violent murder. Even Will, knowing it was staged, was impressed by how realistic it looked. It really looked like he had been murdered. Will just wondered what excuse they would come up with for never finding his body, along with how Hannibal had excused it away as a small amount of blood.

Freddie had initially said the death of Matthew was a threat to the police, and specifically a message to Will, but her tune changed when Will's murder had become obvious.

The death of Matthew Brown, previously considered a message to the Bloodhound and the Police department, now revealed to be an act of revenge.

It became clear over time that the Chesapeake Ripper had an odd fascination with the local police detective, Will Graham. Also known as the Bloodhound, Graham was working with the FBI to track the killer down. It is still unclear what the true nature of their connection was, but we can now see the Ripper was more than just interested in the detective.

Matthew Brown has been revealed to be a serial killer himself, being responsible for the vigilante murders of criminals who had never been convicted. It has also come to light that he likely killed our celebrity cop, the Bloodhound. The scene was almost too gruesome to show here, having Will Graham's blood spattered on every surface in Brown's apartment. Had Graham come too close to discovering the true nature of his very own partner?

The fact that Brown was murdered by the Ripper after he killed the Bloodhound, poses a unique question.

Were Graham and the Ripper closer than we thought?

Surely, the Ripper wouldn't kill another murderer for a simple kill such as that of a policeman. The Ripper had killed police as well, in the past. One was quite recent, being a message for the Bloodhound himself. No. The only explanation for such an act is bitter revenge. The Chesapeake Ripper, in a furious rage that his own pet detective had been killed, came after the man who had done it.

Will Graham most certainly knew who the Chesapeake Ripper is, but kept it quiet as he masqueraded as a law enforcing officer. He fooled the FBI, likely leading them in circles around themselves as he had secret rendezvous with his murderous lover. We should never have trusted a man who rose to fame so quickly without any proof of his worth.

The only regret we should have in seeing this scourge be taken from us is that we will never be able to question him on the identity of the Ripper.

Will was done reading. He turned off the iPad and slid it away from himself. Hannibal looked up for a moment, tracking the movement and then glancing up to see Will's reaction.

"A bit tasteless, is she not?" Hannibal asked, his tone conversational.

Will hummed in agreement, thinking.

"I think you would be able to amend that, don't you?" Will asked.

Hannibal stopped his work, looking up at Will curiously. He gauged Will's emotions, clearly trying to decide if Will was serious, or had spoken without thinking first.

"Have you made your decision, Will?" Hannibal asked, instead of answering Will's question.

Will leaned forward and plucked a grape from the fruit bowl. He rolled it between his fingers for a moment before popping it into his mouth.

"Franklyn hasn't done any real harm," he said, "and no one makes my blood boil more than Freddie Lounds. If she wasn't someone you were considering, I suggest you fix that."

Hannibal smiled.

"I am always considering her," he replied, "though I am rather fond of her work concerning my art. I suppose that is what has spared her to this point. She certainly has done herself no favors recently, has she?"

Will shook his head, snatching a few more grapes. He liked them when they were so fresh. They almost crunched when he bit into them, and popped in his mouth pleasantly.

He had been able to eat more every day, and Hannibal let him leave the IV in his room, so he tried to spend as much time walking around the house and the bluff as he could. He was gaining his strength, and he reveled in the clarity of mind he had when he wasn't on drugs. It wasn't something he had ever thought he would lose, so he took particular pleasure in having it back.

"She only does what will benefit her in the short term," Will agreed, "and I don't think she realizes how much danger she ends up putting herself in."

Hannibal nodded.

"You should know, Will, that if you want her to be the last kill of this sounder, you are going to have to say it. You have to ask."

Will sighed.

If he was honest with himself, he had known Hannibal would say that. Hannibal wanted Will to be frank about what he wanted. He always did. Hannibal also wanted him to be the one to make the decision. Hannibal wouldn't settle for implications. Will would have to say it outright.

"Hmm. Give me another day to think about it," Will said, rolling a grape over his knuckles casually. He wasn't going to make it that easy for Hannibal.

Hannibal sighed, though Will saw right through the act. He wasn't actually as impatient as he tried to seem. He was enjoying the game.

"You are only postponing the inevitable, dearest," Hannibal said, resuming his food preparation, "It would be much more efficient of you to simply make a decision."

Will scoffed.

“What would be the fun in that?” he asked.

Hannibal grinned, and it struck Will like a bullet to his heart.

What the hell was he doing? He was actually entertaining the thought of asking a serial killer to kill someone for him. He was talking casually while a cannibalistic murderer cooked right in front of him. He was smiling and laughing as if life was good and nothing was wrong in the world.

Will looked down at his hands and jumped. He shouted and fell backwards, hitting the floor with a crash, and knocking the breath from his lungs.

Hannibal was at his side in a moment, running his hands over Will and checking for injury. He put a hand to Will’s forehead, and his eyes shone with concern.

“Will, what is it? Is something wrong?”

Will clutched at the fabric of Hannibal’s suit, gasping for breath and staring back at the counter.

“Eyes,” was all he managed to choke out.

It was true. On the counter where Will had just been sitting, were eyes. Human eyes, torn from their sockets and left to roll over the surface of the counter freely. They all stared at Will, leaving a wet and sticky substance on the smooth granite. Their veins pulsed, and Will could see the light of life from within them. They were watching him. They could see him.

Hannibal shushed Will softly, stroking a hand through his hair. Will whimpered, terrified.

“You should rest, darling. You have been very active today. You are not used to it after being in bed for so long. Let me put you back to bed.”

Will squeezed his eyes shut, shaking his head.

“No,” he said.

Hannibal’s movements froze, and Will could feel he was unsure what Will meant.

“I don’t like the medicine. You always put me on drugs when I’m in bed. I hate them. I hate how they feel.”

There was another moment of hesitation before Hannibal resumed his activity. He scooped Will up in his arms as if he weighed nothing. That was a ridiculous thought, because Will knew they weren’t even that different in size. He moved toward Will’s room, and Will’s grip on the fabric of his vest tightened.

“No need to worry, Will,” Hannibal soothed, “I’ll leave the IV where it is for now. You shouldn’t worry about it. I should have known you would grow to fear your bed if I paired it

with the unpleasant sensation of the sedatives."

Will's breathing slowed, and he gradually released his grip on Hannibal's clothes. Hannibal set him gently into the bed and began unbuttoning Will's shirt.

Will had been allowed to dress himself after the first few days, thank god, and had found that Hannibal brought some of Will's own clothes to the house. He wouldn't be forced or expected to wear fancy clothes like Hannibal.

Will had known that, though. Hannibal had told him.

"Once you are comfortable, I will make you some tea," Hannibal said, sliding the fabric off Will's shoulders, "it Will help you relax."

Hannibal laid Will back on the mattress and pulled the sheet over him. Will finally opened his eyes, and didn't see any horrors. He sighed in relief. Maybe it had been in his mind.

Hannibal began to move away, and Will panicked. He reached out and grabbed Hannibal's clothes again. Hannibal turned back, once again concerned.

"Don't leave me," Will begged, afraid that the eyes would return as soon as he was alone, "Please."

Hannibal smiled softly. He slipped off his shoes and slid into the bed alongside Will.

"I promise I will never leave you, Will," Hannibal said, pulling Will close and nuzzling his hair.

Will sighed happily and allowed his eyes to slip closed.

Chapter End Notes

Three more chapters to go!

Feelings

Chapter Summary

Warning: another mention of suicidal thoughts. Nothing comes of it, I promise.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will woke up in the same position, still without the IV, to his joy. Hannibal was still there, too, asleep. Will didn't move, knowing from experience that Hannibal would wake up if he tried to get up. He just used the moment of stillness to watch the other man.

Will tried desperately to reconcile what he knew Hannibal to be with the image he was given now. Hannibal looked so unassuming and harmless. It was hard to imagine him being able to commit the murders Will had seen.

If Will focused on the subtle nuances of the killings, and what he knew of Hannibal, he could blur the lines.

In retrospect, maybe it made sense.

Of everything Will knew about the Ripper, most of it actually lined up with how Hannibal was. He was detail oriented and artistic, he came from Europe, he was confident and talented, he didn't worry, and he knew Will better than anyone. Hannibal despised rudeness over everything, and valued beauty over almost everything.

Will stared at Hannibal's sleeping form. It was difficult to see him as a killer when he appeared so vulnerable. The soft fringe of his hair fell over his brow, and softened the sharp lines of his face. His breathing came in small, relaxed puffs that tickled Will's nose.

Will slowly lifted his hand, controlling his movements so as to not wake Hannibal just yet. He brushed the lock of hair away from Hannibal's face, and traced his brow with his fingers. He ran them along Hannibal's cheekbone, and eventually brought them down to his lips. Hannibal's lips were relaxed into a soft pout, parted just a bit as he slept. Will traced the bottom lip softly, thoughts of murder slipping farther away. It just wasn't cohesive.

Hannibal's tongue darted out from between his lips and swiped over Will's fingers before returning. He then pressed a light kiss to Will's fingertips, and opened his eyes.

"Good morning, amour," Hannibal said softly, sounding amused.

Will withdrew his hand, feeling caught. He couldn't remember ever doing something like that, especially then being caught by Hannibal. He hadn't exactly been discreet about his

affection.

“I did not intend to sleep here,” Hannibal confessed, though he didn’t sound sorry about it, “and I believe I left some food out. That is terribly careless of me.”

Neither of them made any move to get up, just staring at each other in the morning light. They had managed to sleep right through the night. They must have both been tired. Will wondered if Hannibal had been sleeping poorly, or staying awake for too long for some reason. It wasn’t like him to neglect his health like that.

“You’re not usually careless,” Will noted, trying not to acknowledge the oddness of the situation they were in.

Hannibal smiled. His gaze was just as adoring as ever as he lifted one of his own hands to Will’s face and just traced his jaw. Will was sure it couldn’t feel that nice, being covered in rough stubble, but Hannibal had always had a weird concept of what was pleasant.

“Indeed not,” Hannibal agreed, “but I suppose mistakes can be made when one has a worthy distraction in their life.”

Will swallowed, tearing his eyes away from Hannibal’s.

“Don’t make too many mistakes,” he whispered, “or someone might take advantage of your distracted state.”

Hannibal chuckled softly, lifting himself up rolling over so he was almost above Will, caging Will in between his arms. Will had to roll onto his back to keep facing him. Hannibal ducked his head and kissed Will.

“Are you confessing that person would be you?” he asked, amused.

Will swallowed again, his eyes on Hannibal’s tie rather than his face. Will lifted his hands to Hannibal’s chest, mentally keeping the distance between them. It was a foolish thought, but he pretended he would be able to keep Hannibal that far away with just his strength.

“You know Jack is just waiting for the Ripper to slip up once,” Will said instead of answering directly, “and he is good at his job. They will find you if you give them anything to work with now.”

Hannibal huffed a soft laugh and nodded.

“He would certainly try,” Hannibal agreed, “Though perhaps you give our friends in the FBI too much credit. I remember they were quite desperate for you to help them.”

Will shook his head, not really disagreeing, but unsure what he should do.

“Jack has a reputation among the students in the academy as being clever, and among the other agents as being ruthless. He won’t stop. You can’t give him an inch,” Will said.

Hannibal hummed. He slowly allowed more of his weight to press down on Will's hands, as if testing whether Will actually wanted to maintain this distance. Will was nervous Hannibal would entirely lower himself onto Will, and Will wouldn't have the physical or mental strength to stop him. Hannibal felt the resistance and stopped the test with a slight tilt to his head.

"Are you concerned for my well being, Will?" Hannibal asked.

They both knew Hannibal already knew the answer to that question. He just wanted to see what Will would say.

"I can't exactly make up my mind about that if you get killed or incarcerated," Will snapped back, not giving Hannibal any room to pry apart his words.

Hannibal smiled and nodded. He rolled away from Will and stood up from the bed. He stretched gracefully and walked out of the room.

Will wondered if Hannibal remembered Will wasn't on the IV. It would be weird for him to have forgotten, but Will hadn't been left alone while he was off the IV since being brought to this house. He almost didn't know what to do with himself.

Almost.

Will stood up and quickly walked around the bed. He scowled at the metal IV stand and all its components.

Will made quick work of it. If he felt a bit more strong at the time, he would have bent the metal pieces beyond usability. As he was, he simply dismantled it, taking apart the bolts and screws. He even took the wheels off and pulled apart the pieces. He wasn't sure any of it would stop Hannibal, but it would at least inconvenience him, and that was good enough.

Will opened the window and tossed some screws and bolts into the garden outside. He was standing there, staring at the flowers beneath the window when he heard a sigh come from behind him. He turned and saw Hannibal in the doorway of the room, staring at the assortment of metal bits that had once been medical equipment.

"I suppose I should have expected as much," Hannibal said, sounding somewhat defeated, "though I didn't expect you to work so quickly. You might have simply asked for it to be taken away, Will."

Will shrugged, walking back to where he had been working and kicking a few of the pieces around just for spite.

"You wouldn't promise not to use it on me again," he stated, "because you know you might. I know you better than that, Doctor Lecter."

Hannibal pursed his lips, but Will knew he was right. Hannibal would have taken it away, but it would have come back the moment he thought it was necessary.

“What will I do now if you become ill?” Hannibal asked, as if this was justification enough to have kept the horrible thing.

“Take me to a hospital,” Will said sarcastically, “oh wait. Everyone thinks I’m dead.”

Hannibal’s lips twitched at Will’s humor, but he quickly hid the reaction in order to preserve his exasperated air.

“Regardless,” Hannibal said, continuing as if none of that had happened, “If you would like to dress, I will prepare something for breakfast.”

He turned and left Will again. Will wondered if Hannibal was trying to make him feel like he had agency in all of this. It was something he had heard about. A manipulation tactic. Making the victim think they had power in a situation, when all the options were controlled by someone else.

Will frowned at himself and closed the door to the room. That gave him at least a small sense of privacy.

He got dressed and tried to think of something to do.

He couldn’t just stay here, could he? He couldn’t just let Hannibal win. He couldn’t let Hannibal’s manipulations work. But they *were* working, weren’t they?

Will sighed and walked back over to the window. He looked out at the long stretch of empty road that trailed off into the distance. He was a bit sad that his room didn’t face the ocean, but he figured Hannibal had reasons for it. He probably wanted to show Will exactly how isolated they were here, and if Will ever got it into his head to throw himself over the cliff, he would have a hard time doing it without Hannibal stopping him.

Will wasn’t sure if he should be grateful for that one. He knew it was a possibility that he would lose his grip on reality under these circumstances. It was a bit touching to think Hannibal had prepared against that eventuality.

Will would have a hard time escaping, and a hard time killing himself.

Will walked back out to the kitchen cautiously, afraid of what he might see once he stepped in. The memory of the eyes flashed in his mind and he had to slow his breathing.

Hannibal looked up and smiled when Will walked in, moving around with his usual grace as he cooked something. Will saw that the bowl of fruit had been moved off the counter. Hannibal must have realized it had been the grapes that Will’s mind had warped the day before. Will glanced around the room, half expecting something else to change and become a horror.

Nothing did, and he slowly walked over to sit at the counter. Hannibal smiled to himself and continued working. He enjoyed having Will there to watch him cook.

Chapter End Notes

Two more chapters to go. I hope you are all still enjoying it.

Tasting

Chapter Summary

They get some things straight (or, more accurately, Gay)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Here you are, Will. I thought something light so as to not upset your stomach or your mind after your episode."

Hannibal passed Will a bowl of something, and Will just nodded. He picked up the fork Hannibal also provided and slowly began to eat. He never paid attention to what Hannibal made for him to eat anymore. As far as he was concerned, it was all just food. He couldn't trust his own senses, and he certainly couldn't trust Hannibal to tell him anything.

"If I had known you would grow to feel so negatively toward my equipment, I would have found another way, I think," Hannibal said as he worked, making the comment sound casually pleasant.

Will scoffed.

"You'd just put drugs in my food," he snapped back, then frowned down at the bowl, "you aren't doing that now, are you?"

Hannibal laughed lightly.

"No, Will. I have not put anything in your breakfast. I'm not fond of adding medication to my food."

Will nodded, taking another bite.

"You just like adding body parts to it," he said sourly.

Hannibal raised an eyebrow.

"That doesn't deter you from eating, it seems," he noted.

Will shrugged.

"I've been eating people without knowing it for months. I'm already as guilty of this as you. It wouldn't do anyone any good. The food is already dead, I'm still here, and you aren't going to learn."

Hannibal frowned at that.

“If you would like me to stop feeding them to you, I will stop,” he said, sounding resigned to the idea, “I do not wish to force anything on you you find unbearable.”

Will froze in his movements, he furrowed his brow at his food.

Of all things, Will hadn’t expected Hannibal to say *that*. He hadn’t thought Hannibal actually cared about what Will wanted, at least when it came to that sort of thing. He hadn’t cared if Will would have come here willingly. He hadn’t cared if Will would have let him cover up his disappearance with staging a crime scene. He hadn’t cared that Will hadn’t wanted to be on an IV, until Will dismantled it.

Of course, there had been some things Hannibal had made a point to show respect for.

He had provided Will with his preferred clothes. He had left Will alone if he asked for it. He had not put Will back on the IV after he expressed his distaste for it. He had stayed in bed with Will when he was afraid to be alone. Hannibal had arranged for Will’s dogs to be picked up and taken care of immediately once he had made the decision to bring Will here.

It was a gamble every time. Will didn’t know when Hannibal would care and when he wouldn’t.

Will looked at the food in his bowl. It changed, right in front of him, into a beating human heart. He wasn’t startled, this time. He just watched it beat for a few moments. The blood spurted from the arteries and stained the inside of the bowl.

Will poked it with his fork, fixated by the sight of the lump of muscle reacting to the gentle prodding. He skewered a bit and pulled it away from the main mass.

Will looked up and made direct eye contact with Hannibal as he placed the piece of his breakfast on his tongue.

Hannibal grinned.

“I’ve made my decision,” Will stated, trying not to lean on Hannibal at all as they walked around outside the house. He really hated how weak he had gotten from being in bed so long, but he was getting better.

Hannibal hummed, encouraging Will to continue. It had been a few days since the incident, and Hannibal had apparently opted not to bother Will about the looming question.

Will stared at the bunches of bright pink and white flowers as they walked past the window to his room. The Sweet Williams had become somewhat of a theme with Hannibal, it seemed. It was like he wanted to remind Will constantly of the things he had done for him. Will knew Hannibal wanted him to remember. He wanted Will to think about the things he had done, but he wanted Will to remember them with a smile. He wanted Will to think of them fondly as stepping stones to where they were now.

Will wasn't sure he could do *that* yet. He was still working past the hallucinations of body parts. He knew they weren't real, usually. He just never knew where they would show up next. He hadn't told Hannibal about them after the first time. He didn't want to give Hannibal an excuse to give him any medication.

"Freddie Lounds," Will declared.

Hannibal sighed softly. Will knew why, but he wanted to poke at him a bit. He was certainly poking Will a fair amount.

"You know how I feel about this, Will," Hannibal said softly.

Will smiled.

"I know. Maybe I want you to say what you want, too," he said, "reciprocation, Doctor Lecter."

Hannibal pulled Will closer into his side and pressed a kiss to his hair.

"I would very much like it if you would use my first name, Will," he said, "and you must tell me what you want to be done about Freddie Lounds."

Will grinned and nodded.

"I want Freddie to be the next meal we share, Hannibal," he said.

Hannibal stopped. He turned Will around by his shoulders. He looked Will in the eyes, his own eyes filled with something broken and adoring. He placed his hands along Will's jaw and pulled him into a kiss.

Will allowed himself this one.

The last few times Hannibal had initiated a kiss, Will hadn't let himself feel it, or return it. He had refused it, feeling obligated to keep himself separate from Hannibal in any way he could.

Will knew now that they couldn't be separated ever again. They were so close to being the same person at this point that they wouldn't be able to live without each other. Will knew that if he ever tried or managed to escape this place that Hannibal had created for them, Hannibal would find him and kill anyone who had seen him. Hannibal would kill anyone who helped him leave. Hannibal would bring Will back and brush his hair out of his face as he gave him some medication to fuzz his mind and keep him there. Will would either have to suffer for the rest of his life, or he could let himself fall back into the hot darkness of Hannibal's mind.

It was better for everyone if Will just fell.

They separated, both gasping a bit in want for air. Hannibal pressed their foreheads together, and Will could see that he had tears starting to fall from his eyes.

Will raised his hands to Hannibal's face and brushed the wetness away with his thumbs. He hadn't ever seen Hannibal cry before.

“You do not know how much you mean to me, Will Graham,” Hannibal said, his grip on Will tightening slightly as if he might vanish.

“Yes I do, Hannibal,” Will replied, “remember, I know you better than anyone. Now, you had better be on your way. Dinner is only in a few hours. I don’t know how far away from Baltimore we are, but I did say the *next* meal we share, Hannibal.”

Hannibal smiled and kissed Will again. He held onto Will like he might not be real, and Will thought that was almost funny. Out of the two of them, he should be the one questioning reality.

“Come with me,” Hannibal whispered.

Will felt his heart stop in his chest.

Will wasn’t sure what he was supposed to feel about all of this. He knew Hannibal wanted him to help him kill Freddie. He just didn’t know if he could.

Hannibal had driven them both back to Baltimore, and they were in the basement again.

Will looked around, remembering what had happened last time he had been here. He couldn’t see any evidence that Matthew had ever lain on the floor dying. He didn’t see anything that suggested he had ever been there before.

The cuts on Hannibal’s wrists were healing, but they served as the only solid reminder of what had happened before.

Hannibal moved around in the space, and Will felt something intense in his chest.

He split into his two selves again. It hadn’t happened for a while, and he almost fell over from the shock of seeing things from both sets of eyes again.

He stayed standing where he was, while his other self walked over to stand under the meat hook where Hannibal had been fastened once. He looked up at it with curious fascination. He looked at the tools as Hannibal set them out, the scalpels and saws. The syringes and restraints.

When Hannibal looked up at Will, the other faded into him. Hannibal and Will’s other self blended and bled into each other until it was just Hannibal standing there, looking at Will.

Will swallowed and stepped forward, walking right up to Hannibal.

Hannibal was still, allowing Will to do what he may. He was always like that. He had almost always waited for Will to choose the direction they would go.

Will took Hannibal’s hands and studied the fading cuts. They were just a few scarlet lines along the elegant shape of Hannibal’s artistic wrists.

Will couldn’t feel the other self anymore. He didn’t feel like he was only a half. He didn’t feel like he didn’t know part of himself anymore. He traced the lines that had been made by Matthew, remembered the lines he had cut in retaliation, and felt whole for the first time he could remember.

Will lifted Hannibal’s hands and kissed the marks that had been left there.

“I told you they would heal quickly,” Hannibal reminded him softly.

Will moved his hands up to Hannibal’s hair and gripped tightly, knowing it was bordering on painful for him. Hannibal let him, not moving or wincing at the sensation. He just looked at Will, waiting to see what he would do.

“I’m not split anymore,” he said, “It’s not me and the Ripper in here anymore. It’s just me.”

Will used his grip on Hannibal’s hair to pull him into a rough kiss. Hannibal held onto Will like he might lose him. Will knew that was ridiculous. They would never lose each other again. They were the same. They were conjoined.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was a bit longer than most of the others. The next and last chapter is more like an epilogue, but I just really wanted to write it, so it's going to be included.

I updated early because I am leaving on a camping trip and will miss the day I was supposed to update. That being said, I will probably be late to reply to your comments, but I will get to them once I am in the realm of the internet again.

The last chapter will be up on the 30th, unless I die.
<3

Permanent Lessons

Chapter Summary

Long live Freddie Lounds

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Freddie walked into her apartment and tossed her keys onto the table. She dropped her purse into a chair and sighed.

Jack Crawford had tried to keep her away from the story again today. He was upset with her for the articles she had written on the Bloodhound. He had even borderline threatened her for the piece she had written about the scene in Matthew Brown's apartment. He was very protective of his pet police man, even after he was dead.

If Freddie were a sentimental person, she would admire that in him.

She wasn't.

Freddie made her way over to her laptop, pulling her camera from her pocket and taking out the sim card.

She had managed to get in on the action even with his little minions trying to get in her way. She might not know very much about what was going on, but that had never stopped her before. What she could tell was that there was a story to be told, and she was the one who was going to do it no matter what Agent Crawford tried to do to stop her.

The lamp on the table clicked on, and Freddie spun around in her seat.

She wouldn't have believed it if she wasn't seeing it.

Will Graham, wearing a three piece suit, was sitting at her table. His posture was relaxed, leaning back in the chair with one elbow on the table next to the lamp he had just turned on. His hair was far more tame than she had ever seen it, and she had seen it plenty. He was a hard man to find anything about. She had done her work, and something was very different about him now.

"So, you're not dead," Freddie said.

Never give them the upper hand. She couldn't let him see she was surprised, or afraid. She was actually very afraid. She couldn't see any reason Will Graham would be here, after having been declared dead. She just knew that he didn't have any reason to like her.

Will smiled and nodded.

“I’m not,” he agreed, “thanks to my ability to break out of my own police car.”

Freddie wasn’t sure why he was here, but she was deadly curious now. If she made it out of this alive, she would have the story of the century. She had to play it right and do what she could to make it out.

“So, that part was true,” she said, “you being kidnapped and locked in your own car.”

Will tipped his head and looked at her suspiciously, as if she was the one *he* should be worried about.

“Yes. I didn’t injure myself when I kicked out the window, though. That was a bit of hyperbole, thanks to my other half.”

Freddie frowned. She had tried to catch Will dating someone, but he was very good at not being tracked. He was good at disappearing. Whoever he called his other half must be something serious. He didn’t even have friends. The only person she had ever found out he had been anywhere with was his psychiatrist.

Oh. Now *that* would be a story.

“Have you been dating Doctor Lecter?” she asked, keeping her tone even.

Will smirked, and she took that as a yes. This was *really* a big story. Freddie wanted to get out of this alive so she could write this. She would be set for life.

“ *You* claim I was seeing the Chesapeake Ripper,” Will said, tracing a pattern on the table with his finger. It was a calm, casual movement. He didn’t seem on edge, or even very alert. The Will Graham Freddie had watched was never this at ease. Ever.

“Well, I can make an amendment to what I said. He certainly showed interest in you. He killed your partner,” Freddie said, “Unless *you* did that, of course.”

Will flashed a smile that was full of teeth. It made a shiver run down Freddie’s spine. She felt like she was trapped by a predator. It was absurd, though. Will Graham had never killed another person. He had a spotless police record, being sure to shoot at the legs if he was forced to pull the trigger. He didn’t have a violent bone in his body.

“Well, I wasn’t going to say anything, but you guessed it, so I suppose I didn’t have to,” Will said, “Honestly, my other half was just very pleased with my work. He wanted to show it off.”

Freddie froze. She hadn’t been moving before, but now she wasn’t breathing, or even blinking. There was something wrong with this situation. She didn’t know what was going on, but she felt like she needed to escape as quickly as possible.

“Your other half,” she said, trying to stall and figure out an escape route, “I thought you just said they aren’t the Ripper. I thought you were saying it’s Doctor Lecter.”

Will laughed. It was the first time she had heard him laugh. It was a full, honest laugh, and he threw his head back for it.

“Would you care to add anything, my Peryton, or are you just expecting me to do all the work?” Will asked.

He was looking directly over Freddie’s shoulder, and she felt her heart stop.

Of course Will wasn’t alone. He had somehow faked his death, and had come to talk to her. There was no way he had done that all alone. Why would he have come *here* alone?

“I was merely awaiting your invitation, dearest.”

Freddie recognized that voice. She had tried to get an interview with him after he started his sessions with Will Graham. She had been very curtly told no.

Freddie turned around slowly and came face to face with Doctor Hannibal Lecter. He smiled at her, but he didn’t seem happy exactly. He seemed poised, the way a leopard is poised as they stalk their prey.

“Good afternoon, Miss Lounds,” he said, ever polite.

Freddie swallowed hard. She was trying to figure out where all the pieces fit together.

“Okay, so Will Graham really has been dating his psychiatrist,” she concluded, glancing between the two men. Neither offered any argument. “But why are you *here* , and what did he just call you?”

The last question was pointed at Doctor Lecter, and he smiled. This time he *did* actually seem pleased. His eye flicked over to where Will was sitting before he decided to answer Freddie’s question.

“My dearest has never really liked the name the press gave me. He would have opted for Peryton, which is much more reflective of what it is I actually am,” he explained, as if any of that made sense to Freddie.

“What name did the press give you?” she asked, “I never heard anyone give you any name other than Doctor Lecter. And I looked. I asked all around. There’s nothing on you.”

Doctor Lecter spread his hands as if to say “and yet, here we are,” and Will cleared his throat as he stood up.

“You see, Freddie, you were right. Both of your guesses were right. I have been seeing my psychiatrist, and the Chesapeake Ripper is in love with me. Lucky for me, I didn’t have to choose between them in the end.”

Freddie felt the blood leave her face, and she knew then that she wasn’t going to make it out of this alive. She had found the identity of the Chesapeake Ripper, and found out that a famous police officer was his accomplice. They were both in her apartment, and there was no escape.

“Now,” Doctor Lecter said, turning her attention back to him, “as for why we are here. My dearest has made a very special request of me. I find it hard to ever refuse him anything.”

Freddie felt the knife across her throat before she had the time to register Will’s movement. The cut was quick, and she only felt the sharp pain as her arteries were severed.

“I never got around to telling Jack you eat them,” Will remarked, perfectly calm as Freddie fell to the floor.

She looked up at the killers as Will stepped over her to stand with Doctor Lecter. Neither of them looked at her as she bled out on her own floor. Will hadn’t wanted her to choke on her blood. He wanted her to pay for her words with the blood from her veins.

The last thing Freddie Lounds saw before she died was Hannibal Lecter, lifting Will’s bloodied hand to his own mouth and licking her blood from his fingers. They were both smiling.

Chapter End Notes

And that's the end, folks. It's been a adventure, and I'm glad you have all made it this far with me. I wouldn't have made it here alone. Kind words keep me going and motivate me to create more.

If you have been following from the beginning and are sad to see it go, I have a new fic beginning in the place of this one that I will be updating regularly. Feel free to check it out, though I know it won't be the same.

Thank you for indulging me. <3

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!